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IN THE CLOUDY AND DARK DAY



G. H. KNIGHT



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IN THE CLOUDY AND
DARK DAY

Thus saith the Lord God ; behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered IN THE CLOUDY AND DARK DAY.—*Ezek.* xxxiv. 11, 12.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort ; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.—1 *Cor.* i. 3, 4.

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INTRODUCTORY
THE UNIVERSAL BAPTISM

5-10-11
O Christ, whose Voice once made fierce billows rest,
And chased from sorrow's eye the blinding tear,
Calm Thou the heavings of each troubled breast,
And soothe to quietness its waves of fear.

Let Thy great Words of heavenly power and peace
Speak comfort to the hearts of wearied men,
Till sin and death and pain and sorrow cease,
And earth is made a Paradise again.

I

INTRODUCTORY

THE UNIVERSAL BAPTISM

ELIPHAZ the Temanite was only expressing an age-long experience when he said, "Though affliction cometh not from the dust, neither doth sorrow spring out of the ground, yet man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward."¹ He was not a soured pessimist who said that. It was not the petulant wail of a disillusioned man with whom everything had gone wrong. It was the calm, sad verdict of one who looked the world in the face, and his words are as true to-day as they were three thousand years ago. Grief is a universal baptism—the only baptism that *is* universal. The cup is always going round; and, at some time or other, in some way or other, in some measure or other, every child of Adam has to drink of it, and many have to drain it to the bitter dregs. All the world over, the chalice passes from hand to hand, from lip to lip.

¹ Job v. 7.

Those surely are blind to facts who almost scornfully refuse to speak of the world as "a vale of tears"; for tears bedew the life-path of every one of us. There are tears on the face of the child. They fall thick from the eyes of manhood and womanhood. Old age, too, has its tears, sometimes the saltiest of all. And there are heart-weepings where there is no outward sign of the deep-seated pain; tears of regret, tears of apprehension, tears of remorse and shame, tears of despair, tears for the wrecking of earthly hopes, and tears for the burden of unforgiven sin. The long story of the world, if fully told, would be only like Ezekiel's roll, "a book written within and without with lamentation and mourning and woe."¹

If it is strange how often deep trouble comes in unexpected and inexplicable ways, it is stranger still that it comes not merely upon those who are living *without* God—there would be small wonder in that—but upon so many who are living humbly, and holily, and faithfully *with* God, on those who have done nothing to bring it down, but are the innocent victims of other men's iniquity. In such a case, it comes not as a punishment for any definite sin, but only as a gracious, though hard, discipline leading to larger and diviner good; but, one way or other,

¹ Ezek. ii. 10.

there is no escaping it, however fiercely, sometimes, we may rebel against the blow.

Now why repeat such truisms as these? Only to set over against them what is equally true though not equally believed, that God has for every sufferer some loving, helpful, and consoling message of peace. It is just on this account that His great Book is so full of tender comfortings from its first page to its last. It is just this that makes its Gospel of Life and Hope so dear to suffering souls.

For it is, pre-eminently, the Book of Joy; full of sorrows, but full of victory over sorrow too; its deepest tones the tones of a ringing gladness, wonderfully uplifting and marvellously sweet.

Think of the world as it always has been and still is, a world full of tragedies too deep to be measured, and griefs too numerous to be reckoned up, and is not the greatest need of men that there should be some one to comfort them, to lift them, to give them hope? That is the blessed work of God's great Book, because it is the blessed work of God Himself who is "*the God of consolation*" and whose loving will it is "that we through comfort of the Scriptures may have hope."¹

"It is worth our thought," says Bishop Huntington, "how small the audience would be that

¹ Rom. xv. 4.

would assemble weekly, life through, to listen to a Gospel that had nothing to say to sufferers. Poor, weak, and broken hearts, staggering under their loads, would refuse a Comforter Who had never wept Himself, nor remembered that His followers must weep. A religion that addressed itself only to those who are in a state of comfort would be like a system of navigation calculated only for clear weather, and giving no aid when night and cloud have wiped out all way-marks from earth and sky, and the tempest shrieks in the darkness over an unknown sea." God's messages are not messages from a useless Comforter. They are messages of Light, and Love, and Hope, and Home. May every reader of the Divine Messages contained in the pages of this book find them so !

There are two classes of men to whom the consolations of God are of no interest whatever—those who are, as yet, untroubled by any deep grief, and those who are completely indifferent to their personal sin. There are multitudes everywhere who seem to go calmly, even jauntily, through life. Having sound health, plenty of enjoyment, and an entire absence of worrying care, they listen wearily to words of comfort which sad hearts beside them welcome as wells of water in a desert land. There are even more who find no attraction in God's consoling voice,

because they know nothing of what it is to lie crushed and broken under the weight of unforgiven sin. It is not consolation that such self-satisfied souls really need, but rather the wound of deep conviction, and a rough awakening out of fatal sleep ; not to have a broken heart bound up, but rather to have a whole heart broken down in penitence at the feet of Christ.

To all, however, who in the sorrows of heart and life do really feel the need of sympathy and help from God, there is enough and more than enough in this great Book of His ; for it shows Him to be what, without it, not one of us would have imagined Him to be, a Holy One Who is also an infinitely Pitying One, a Father Who indeed chastens His foolish children with a rod, and yet, so soon as He sees the tear of sorrow on the smitten cheek, takes His own wounded sufferers into His arms, and consoles them after all.

Reading the Bible through, with this thought in the mind, we are surprised to see how predominant in it the element of consolation is, how tenderly God deals with the sinful, how more than tenderly He speaks to the sorrowful, the broken-hearted, and the tried. Nearly all the great promises that lie scattered over the pages of this Book were promises made to men in great difficulties and straits. As soon as we

come into the same or any similar position, the promise is there for our faith also to grasp : and we never know till then how great is its sustaining power. The promises are like bridges across a torrent-bed, which do not seem to be of much use when the water is low, and the channel is almost dry, but which will be used most thankfully when the floods are out, and a raging stream is sweeping between the banks. God has provided for all our emergencies ; no possible kind of sorrow has been overlooked ; but the value of His consolations we never know till the day comes when we must have them or die. And in that day we often learn to our joyful surprise that they had long been waiting for us, though they never exactly fitted our need till then. With the wondering vision of the newly opened eye we see that He had been thinking of us when we had not been thinking of Him, and had been thoughtfully forecasting our need, and providing for it, while the actual day of that need was still far in the distance, and known only to Himself.

Word of the ever-living God,
Will of His glorious Son !
Without Thee how could earth be trod,
Or heaven at last be won ?

B. BARTON.

IS IT ALL A MYSTERY ?

Darkness

Fair visions gleaming through the darkness beckoned
My buoyant steps along the sunny way ;
Sweet voices thrilled me, till I fondly reckoned
That life would be one long blue summer day.

This was the way my feet had gladly taken,
And, blindly lured by that deceitful gleam,
I would have wandered on, by God forsaken,
Till death awoke me from my fatal dream.

My pleasant path in sudden darkness ended,
My footsteps slipped, my hope was well-nigh gone ;
I could but pray ; and as my prayer ascended,
Thy face, O Saviour, through the darkness shone.

I woke from dreams ; and, cured of all my blindness,
I saw Thy Hand had checked my downward way :
The pain was keen, but all in loving kindness,
That led me out of darkness into Day.

J. D. BURNS.

II

IS IT ALL A MYSTERY?

THE utter unexpectedness of many life-sorrows is one of their strangest characteristics. They come like a thunder-burst out of a clear sky, not only without any premonition of their coming, but without any apparent reason for it; and the crushed heart asks, either angrily or despairingly, why it has been sent. Many another sufferer besides Job has turned the face to heaven in amazed perplexity, and prayed "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me";¹ and when no answer to that cry has come, has either looked upon the whole thing as an insoluble mystery, or coldly and half-rebelliously resigned himself to the worship of another god altogether whom he calls "inevitable fate."

But surely we are often entirely wrong in talking of the "mysteriousness" of God's dealings with us. We may not know *all* His reasons for them, but *some* of His reasons are plain

¹ Job x. 2.

enough.) In multitudes of cases they are plainly His sharp but merciful way of summoning a reckless, self-centred, self-indulgent, worldly heart to stop and think. They are meant to shake it out of its foolish security, and out of that love of the world which is so ruinous to our best and highest life.

“A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool’s back”¹ is one of the pithy sayings of Solomon; and he learned it not only from his own experience, but also from the teaching of his father David, who wrote: “Be ye not as the horse and as the mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, else they will not come near unto thee.”²

Suffering is often God’s hard but salutary restraint laid upon a wilful life that is ruining itself. If we choose to live as the beasts that perish, God will deal with us as with beasts; the cold hard bit will be thrust between the teeth, and the lash will not be spared: and yet that sore check given to a wayward soul may be the beginning of its salvation. “Oppression,” says the preacher-king, “will make a wise man mad”;³ but a greater Preacher by far has shown, in His exquisite parable of the prodigal son, how suffer-

¹ Prov. xxvi. 3.

² Ps. xxxii. 9. R.V.

³ Eccl. vii. 7.

ing can make a madman wise. It was just when the sorrows he had brought upon himself by his self-indulgent reckless life were at their worst, that the prodigal "came to himself," turned over a new leaf, said to himself "I will arise and go to my father," and soon thereafter wept out his shame and penitence upon his father's breast.

But it is not the utterly reckless alone who need the bridle and the bit. Even those who are in the main God-fearing often go foolishly very far astray, and need sharp reminders of their folly to bring them back. What a hard "bit" the Lord had to put into the mouth of Lot to rescue him from what would have been death to his soul! Nothing less than a fiery destruction of his foolishly-chosen home and of all his wealth would do. What a terrible "whip" of retribution did David feel when the child of his sin lay dead before his weeping eyes, and when one after another of his house brought shame and misery into his declining years! What a sharp lesson of the folly of worldly ambition was taught to Jehoshaphat after his sinful alliance with the wicked Amaziah, when a furious tempest wrecked the ships he had built to go to Ophir for gold, and they lay broken in pieces at Eziongeber!

Suffering is often God's loud call to repentance.

It is a prophet speaking in God's name, but one of those prophets whom you must go out into the wilderness to hear: and He who loves us better than we think may lead us into a wilderness of shattered ambitions just to get us to listen to that voice which the noise of the world drowns, the voice which says "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end."¹ Joab, in his insolent defiance, refused to go to Absalom, though message after message was sent, till Absalom "set his barley-field on fire," and then he came quickly enough! Alas for us if God has sometimes to burn up our comforts of every kind before He can get us to listen to Him.

There is often no other way left of saving us from self-destruction. "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity," He says, "and thou wouldst not hear."² "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God," but be sure of this, that He never resorts to severity till His goodness has failed to win any response. Severity is the last resource of love; and so, severity is goodness after all. All who in this way have been won back to God will praise Him for the severity ere all is done. Hezekiah was only expressing the feelings of all God's chastened children when he said, "Behold, it was for my peace that I

¹ Prov. xix. 20.

² Jer. xxii. 21.

had great bitterness ; O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." ¹

How many now in the holiness and joy of heaven could echo these words, and tell us that but for the shattering of earthly hopes they would never have had the heavenly one, that but for being driven out of their self-made paradise they would never have got into God's, that but for being smitten by a Father's hand they would never have had a place in that Father's House !

Does not this also explain much of the sorrow through which even Christian hearts have sometimes to pass ? They know that there is no blessing worth anything except the blessing of God. They would feel their souls utterly darkened if He should take away from them the light of His countenance. They honestly ask to be filled with the peace which that shining alone can give. But then, they are not willing to risk much for the sake of getting it. In all the habits and plans and ambitions of daily life, they have one eye upon God but the other eye upon the world. They love their earthly comforts and luxuries and pleasures so much that, almost unconsciously, these things fill up the largest part of their horizon, and God's glory is put far too much out of view. They are not indifferent to

¹ Isa. xxxviii. 16 R.V.

His glory; far from it: but there is a great dead-weight of worldliness pressing them down, and there is a great world-love that must be taken out of them before they can have the full enjoyment of His peace. The Lord sees that the only way in which that world-love can be killed is the way of some bitter discipline of pain: and so, bad health comes, some prostrating sickness interrupting all their worldly activities comes, bereavement comes making the world look poor, a sudden crash of fortune comes, they are driven out of their paradise into a wilderness of sand; and there the foolish pursuit of worldly good, a pursuit that bade fair to ruin them, is stopped; a merciful Hand destroys their "happiness" to give them "peace," which is a wholly different and infinitely better thing; for it is only when the heart is empty enough to receive it that this peace comes in.

That is a striking sentence in the 99th Psalm: "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance on their inventions." There are the "goodness" and the "severity" going hand in hand. The goodness is for us, the severity is for the sins and follies which we have enshrined beside God, or even instead of God, in the temple of our lives. How many a life, seen as He sees it, is really one long enthronement of self and dethronement of Him!

We will give Him our worship, but will not let Him rule absolutely over us as King. Indeed it sometimes looks as if we were trying to find out how much sinful self-will God will endure in us without striking us down ! He is ever seeking to spare us, but if we will still go on in our self-chosen way, we not only *provoke* Him to smite, we *compel* Him to do it—compel Him, unless all righteousness is to be cast down ashamed, and sin is to be the unchallenged ruler of the world. But if we thus challenge God to combat, by building for ourselves houses of pride into which no entry is to be given to Him, is it any wonder that, through His accepting the challenge, the earth is full of wailing, and that life everywhere is marked by lonely breadths of utter desolation ?

Better a thousand times to suffer the sharpest sorrows here, if they do but lead to repentant faith, and so to heaven at last.

Through pain to peace. Through weariness to rest—
That Love may seek thee, Love comes darkly dressed :
Neglected, spurned, she smites thee, blow on blow,
Until she sees thee lying crushed and low ;
Then shows thee, hid within her yearning breast,
The healing balm thou else couldst never know.

SOUL-HEALING FIRST

THE CRY

The mistakes of my life have been many,
The sins of my heart have been more,
And I scarce can see for weeping ;
But I'll knock at the open door.

I am lowest of those that seek Him,
I am weakest of those who pray ;
But I come as the Saviour bids me,
And He will not say me nay.

U. L. BAILEY.

THE ANSWER

*Rest
satisfaction
restoration*

Rest, weary heart !
The penalty is borne, the ransom paid,
For all thy sins full satisfaction made !
Strive not to do thyself what Christ has done,
Claim the free gift, and make the joy thine own ;
No more by pangs of guilt and fear distrest,
Rest ! calmly rest !

7

H. L. L.

7

III

SOUL-HEALING FIRST

IT would be both utterly cruel and grievously unjust to say that all calamities are retributions for sin; and yet the tendency to say this is very common and very old. Job's self-complacent friends accused him of being a hypocrite whom God was punishing for some sins which he would not confess. When some men told Jesus of Pilate's slaughter of the Galileans, He knew their secret thought that prompted the remark, and said, "Suppose ye that these men were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you nay."¹ Even His own disciples showed the same foolish misinterpretation of providence when they asked regarding the man blind from birth, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"² and He told them that it was not a case of retribution at all, but "that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

That calamities are sometimes retributions

¹ Luke xiii. 2.

² John ix. 2.

cannot be denied. The Bible is full of illustrations of that fact. But wherever the retribution has been seen, the sin for which it was a retribution was also clearly shown. Men were not left to imagine the sin, or to infer it. The sin was patent before the retribution came. Just for this reason it is that God's chastenings are so often called His "rebukes." Christ Himself recognised this fact when He said to the man whom He healed of a lameness that had lasted eight-and-thirty years, "Behold, thou art made whole, sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee."¹ He was pointing back to some early sin in which the cripple had been living nearly forty years before, a sin unknown to or forgotten by all else.

We have no such knowledge of other men's guilty past, and even though we had, that would not justify us in declaring that any calamity befalling them was God's retribution for it: and yet we have a large class of people who are great "discoverers of judgment," and can tell at once why any neighbour has been visited with sudden calamity, though they would bitterly resent such a verdict if passed by others upon them.

Still, though we dare not see positive retribution in the case of others, we may often see it in our own; for conscience tells us many things

¹ John v. 13.

that none beside us know, or even suspect. Was it not this working of conscience that Jesus saw in the palsied sufferer laid at His feet, to whom His first word was "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee"?¹ To all the bystanders, that sufferer's case was only a case of ordinary physical disease; but the Lord saw before Him not merely a sufferer in body but a sufferer in soul, and He knew that the soul-suffering was the deeper of the two. His words to the poor cripple seemed to the onlookers an evading of the point. Their unspoken thought was that He was trying to hide His incompetence to treat the bodily ailment by pretending to give a spiritual healing, the reality or unreality of which none of them could test. Probably only two of all that crowd knew the real facts; one, the sufferer himself; the other, the thought-reading and life-reading Christ. These two knew that the disease was the positive result of some course of sin lying far back in the past, but perpetuating itself in his prematurely wasted frame. This sufferer was always saying to himself, "My sin is ever before me," and Christ knew well that the word of *Forgiveness* was the great word he was longing to hear.

This is a view of suffering which cannot be overlooked. There is many a sufferer in the

¹ Matt. ix. 2.

world to-day who is receiving the commiseration of friends in what they regard as a pure calamity implying no blame in the life it strikes, whereas, if he chose, he could tell them that they are quite mistaking the case. He knows, and his doctor knows, that he is only reaping what he sowed long before. He is "made to possess the iniquities of his youth,"¹ and feeling, perhaps for the first time, the force of the old rebuke, "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter that thou hast forsaken Me, saith the Lord."² His friends wonder at the calmness with which he bears his sufferings, but the reason of his uncomplaining patience is that he is every day saying to himself "I deserve them all." He does not wonder at God's chastening for his sin; he only wonders that the chastisement is not a thousand times more severe.

What is needed in a case like this? The very first thing needed is not a Healer's but a *Saviour's* word, a word of redeeming and forgiving *Grace*. Thousands have heard that word, for the first time, on beds of pain. It is a word which any man may hear if only he opens his heart-ear to listen to it. "I acknowledged my transgressions to the Lord," said David. What came next?

¹ Job xiii. 26.

² Jer. iv. 18, ii. 19.

“And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”¹ There is the blessed immediacy of Divine Forgiveness. There is no recrimination, no hesitation, no exception in it: and, best of all, there is no delay. The very moment that the prodigal came back in tears to his long-forsaken home, he found himself folded in a father’s arms. The reception was immediate, and it was overflowing joy too. And any sin-smitten sufferer, be he who he may, as he lies full of remorse for a wasted past, or sits among the wreckage of all his earthly ambitions—whatever else he believes, may and ought to “believe in the forgiveness of sins,” a forgiveness as complete as God can make it, and to be had in the first moment of his faith in Christ’s atoning blood.

Thank God! there is no sinful heart in all the world that may not find this tender mercy at the hands of the saving Christ. The same voice that brought Lazarus to life when he had been four days dead can restore to life a soul that has been fourscore years dead in sin. Old sins, however old, are not so old as God’s everlasting mercy; and strong sins, however strong, are not so strong as His Omnipotent Grace.

If suffering leads to penitence, and penitence to faith, and faith to pardon, and pardon to peace, the merciful meaning of the suffering

¹ Ps. xxxii. 5.

becomes very plain. It may be punishment, but it is far more than that. It is the seeking Saviour who "searches out His sheep where they are scattered in the cloudy and dark day," making a loving attempt to bring the wanderer home. He has no delight in avenging, but He has an infinite delight in saving ; and all that He means by letting sore suffering come is that in the pain and darkness the memory of a forgotten Father may rise in winning freshness within the breast, and lead us back to Him. A great sufferer once was asked what his experience of God had been, as he lay in weakness and penitence upon his bed ; and his reply was this, "Oh ! He is a great Forgiver, He is a great Forgiver." He had heard the voice of the saving Christ saying, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." That voice is always crying "Come home ! Come home !" and oh ! how longingly He is waiting for a response ! If He lays us low, it is only that He may lift us up. Surely it is a shame that we give Him so much trouble to do it.

But what was it that the great Lord of forgiveness said to the sinful woman at Jacob's well ?¹ It was not "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou *wouldst ask* of Him and He

¹ John iv. 10.

would give thee living water." It was something better than that, "Thou *wouldst have* asked, and He *would have given* thee"; as much as to say "the great blessing of everlasting life might already have been thine; the past five minutes might have sufficed to make thee a happy partaker both of pardon and of peace."

One knock at the door would have opened wide

The home so dear to your heart's desires;

And the hours you spent in the porch outside

Might have glowed by the household fires.

G. MATHESON.

SAD HEART AND WEARY FEET

*Tristesse
Decay*

Thus said the Lord, "Thy days of health are over,"
And, like the mist, my vigour fled away,
Till but a feeble shadow was remaining,
A fragile form fast hasting to decay.

The May of life, with all its blooming flowers,
The joy of life, in colours bright arrayed,
The hopes of life, in all their airy promise—
I saw them in the distance slowly fade.

Then sighs of sorrow in my heart would rise,
And silent tears would overflow my eyes;
But a warm sunbeam from a higher sphere
Stole through the gloom, and dried up every tear.

"Is this Thy will, Good Lord? the strife is o'er;—
Thy servant weeps no more."

MÖWES, H.L.L.

Heb 12

IV

SAD HEART AND WEARY FEET

RETRIBUTIVE sufferings—the sufferings which are plainly rebukes for some special sin—may possibly be more numerous than an outsider knows ; but, after all, they are exceptions only, and not the rule. Disease, accident, bereavement, loss come for the most part without any such explanation of them being possible. They cannot be regarded as sin-brought, but only as God-sent ; sent by Him not to punish sin, but in some cases possibly to prevent future sin, and in every case to work out some undreamt-of good. They are not an emptying of vials of wrath. They are the very reverse of that, the discipline of a far-seeing and tender Love.

This is specially true of that large class of sufferings that are almost life-long ; beginning in early youth, and lasting on through weary years till the very end. It may be that they can sometimes be accounted for by heredity, the unconscious transmission of an enfeebled con-

stitution. It is possible that in some cases the sins of fathers and grandfathers may be thus visited on children and children's children; but in most cases there is no proof of this whatever, at least none that any human eye can detect. The only thing that can be said is that the suffering is "according to the Will of God": and yet that is not a hard, cold, unsympathetic, relentless Will; for, all through the weary years His eye is on a glorious purpose which He is patiently working out—"I know the thoughts which I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end":¹ and the "end" He has in view is not just the ripened perfection of a distant heaven, but the sanctifying and beautifying of the character here and now; and so it is often found that the brightest Christians anywhere to be met are those who have been laid on sick-beds for long years in utter weakness and in almost hourly pain.

~~It is~~ ^{It is} the strange mystery of grace that "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," ~~then~~ ^{And} those whom He loveth much He chasteneth much, and they whom He chasteneth most are the dearest of them all.

~~But~~ ^{Nothing} tries faith and patience more keenly than a discipline like this. A long-drawn-out sickness is worse to bear than a short

¹ Jer. xxix. 11.

one much severer while it lasts. Job could bear patiently a perfect cataract of calamities that were all compressed into the compass of a single day ; but when God's afflicting Hand pressed him lower day after day, and he saw no end of his misery but the grave, his faith gave way, he cursed his life, and bitterly wished he had never been born. It is not the intensity of suffering but the weary length of it that most sorely depresses the heart. Even where faith does not give way, and the long weariness is accepted as God's good and perfect will, the strain of it is often acutely felt. That very saintly man Dr. Payson gave his experience of this when he wrote, " Every night death comes and stands beside my bed in the form of terrible convulsions, each one of which threatens to separate soul from body, and these continue to grow worse and worse till every bone is aching with pain, leaving me with the certainty that I shall have it all to endure the next night again." But he could add, " While my body is thus tortured my soul is perfectly happy, more happy than I can express ; my joy in God so abounds as to make my sufferings not only bearable but welcome." Once, when visiting a sick parishioner, he somewhat abruptly said, " Do you know why God lays people down upon their backs ? " ; and, on the sufferer saying he had never thought of it,

he replied, "I can tell you the reason; it is just that they may *look straight up*." That was one of the precious lessons God had taught him on his bed of pain.

T 2. Many of God's children are learning it still. If not so continuously racked with pain, they have yet been kept almost life-long prisoners in the grip of ill-health, shut out from life's work, and from life's enjoyments too, laid low in sick-rooms, needing the constant ministry of other hands, weary of their own helplessness, and saying sometimes, with subdued yet passionate utterance, "Oh for just one week of perfect health!"

Do they suffer needlessly, these patient souls? Nay, verily. The Lord who loves them is giving them grand compensations and great opportunities as well. They are larger receivers than many. They have more of His sanctifying and consoling grace. They are more intimately in fellowship with the Man of Sorrows. They get more frequent secret visits from Him. And they are larger givers too. They reflect more of His graciousness upon all who see their faith and patience and trust. Their daily lives are preachers of the power of Christ to give what is better than "perfect health," His own "perfect peace," a sweet peace that only shines the more beautifully over lines of pain.

Many, like Stephen, are wearing in the midst of agony "the face of an angel." From their own experience they can tell that sorrow brings Christ closer to the heart than joy can do, and that we get to know Him better in the darkness than in the day. The angel of peace comes sometimes to them at dead of night, when they lie tossing uneasily in weary pain ; and, bending over them, brings the "white stone on which is written the new name which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

3. It is not, however, to the weak and sickly alone that life is often only a long weariness. There are others who find it so, though they receive small sympathy compared with that which is lavished on the sick. They are silent sufferers whose heart-ache few suspect and fewer fully know—I mean that large class on whom has fallen the burden of caring for others too feeble or too thriftless to care for themselves, and whose unceasing, self-sacrificing toil is often very thanklessly received. When a sudden calamity overtakes a home, or when widowhood leaves an invalid mother helpless under the burden of household provision, and the whole family has to depend upon the energy of an elder daughter, how often the heavy load is laid quite unconcernedly upon the shoulders willing to bear it, without any thought of how this


new, unlooked-for, and great responsibility may be utterly blighting that daughter's life. It is looked upon as a matter of course that she should take upon herself the care of all the rest ; and nobly often is that duty done. She turns capable hands to everything, and goes about her work in the home with a smiling face, but there is a secret pang in her heart which she never reveals. No one suspects the greatness of the sacrifice she is making for those she loves, or knows that for them she has resigned some treasured hope dearer to her than life. No one notices that she is nailed to a cross. She consecrates herself to unappreciated self-denials, her lot is bound up with thankless souls ; and though she does not murmur, it is a daily martyrdom. She goes through it bravely and lovingly but with a heart-weariness not shown by word or sign, dedicating her best years to unremitting devotion to those who are too selfish to consider how much they exact, and are barely grateful for the service so nobly done. She has the pang of martyrdom without the palm.

Brave noble hearts ! self-sacrificing, self-surrendering, but feeling every day how much the self-surrender costs—how greatly the angels must love them ! how kindly the eye of Christ must be bent upon them ! and how large will be their recompense in the all-revealing Day ! These

weary years of self-effacement here, how grandly
they will be compensated when all is done !

O thou so weary of thy self-denials,
And fainting so beneath thy little cross !
Is it so hard to bear thy daily trials,
To count all earthly things a gainful loss ?

What if thou always suffer tribulation ?
What if thy painful heart-aches never cease ?
The gaining of the Quiet Habitation
Shall gather thee to Everlasting Peace.



THE REFINER'S FIRE

Lord ! a whole long day of pain
Now at last is o'er ;
Darkness bringing weary strain
Comes to me once more.

Round me falls the evening gloom,
Sights and sounds all cease ;
But within this narrow room
Night will bring no peace.

Come then, Jesus ! o'er me bend,
And my spirit cheer ;
From all faithless thoughts defend,
Let me feel Thee near.

Then if I must wake or weep
All the long night through,
Thou the watch with me wilt keep,
Friend and Guardian true !

Lyra Germanica

V

THE REFINER'S FIRE

FOR God's afflicted children there is a very deep consolation in those frequently repeated emblems of suffering which liken it to a great Refiner's fire, in which He purifies his gold. "I will refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried."¹ This is a sometimes-forgotten part of Christ's redeeming and restoring work. We often think so exclusively of Him as a Saviour of the lost, that we forget another equally divine and equally necessary part of His mission—to be a Sanctifier of the saved. He wants to bring us a thorough-going Redemption, not a mere surface-plaster for the soul's disease. Loving enough to go seeking the lost however far they stray, and to lift them however low they lie, He is yet so Holy that He will tolerate no sin in His rescued ones. He will be a Refiner as well as a Redeemer, burning all

¹ Zech. xiii. 9.

sin out of them that they may be "pure as He Himself is pure."

He has many ways of doing this. He does it by the power of His cleansing Word—by the attractive force of His bright example, by the presence of His Spirit in the heart, and by the varied outward means of enlightenment and appeal; but He does it also by the sore afflictions of His hand: and every child of the kingdom knows how purifying these afflictions may become, how quickly they reveal the dross that mingles with the gold, and how effectually the dross is burned away.

There is far more earthly dross in the hearts of the best Christians than they know till the fire reveals it. What *impatience* did the fire reveal even in so wonderfully patient a man as Job! What secret *atheism* it revealed even in so good a man as Asaph! But the same heat that *reveals* the dross *removes* it too: and it may comfort some who are in the furnace and are alarmed at what the fire is revealing to them, to remember that they see their evil only because God is in the act of taking it away, in order that He may bring them forth as gold so purified that it can be fashioned into "vessels of honour" to His eternal praise.

It is indeed a mortifying proof of what rebellious and intractable children of the Father we

are, that He needs to put us through so sore a discipline before He can use us for any high end. Still, to be sanctified in any way is blessing to us as well as glory to Him ; and many a heart has welcomed the suffering that led to a purer and worthier life ; instead of praying for a mitigation of the heat, has prayed that at any cost, by any fire, the dross of sin might be thoroughly purged away ; and has said, like Thomas Arnold in his last hours of agony, " I thank God for pain."

In every really earnest soul the greatest longing must be to be quit of sin. The supreme attraction of heaven itself is not its peace and glory, but the absolute sinlessness of its blessed life. But sin cannot die till the love of sin has first been killed : and must there not, therefore, be a precious value in the sore earthly sufferings which so often take this love of sin away ?

The refining process is not a quick one. It cannot be completed in an hour or two. The length of the process thus becomes a trial to patience, as well as to faith. But if we say to a sufferer, " Be patient with God," we must also say, " and think how patient God is with you." Is not this one explanation at least of the length of time that some of His suffering ones are kept in the fire ? He wants to have them very pure,

and so He increases the heat till, looking on the molten gold, He sees on its clear surface a reflection of Himself.

Judging by their prayers, one would think that some Christians suppose that God keeps a sort of heavenly warehouse with faith, patience, meekness, love, holiness, put up in packets ready for purchasers, and that just as they would go into a perfumer's shop here below, so they can go to God and ask for this or that beautifying grace in the expectation that it will be delivered to them at once. Christian graces are never obtained in that immediate way. They are the fruit of discipline, and the discipline is often pain. Prayers for heavenly graces will be answered; but the answer will be *training*, and not *immediate gift*.

In all this, however, we must remember that only where there is real gold to work upon will any trouble be taken to make it pure: which is but another way of saying that we must be truly His children before His refining process can begin. It is not the refining that makes us His. It is because we are already His that He refines us to make us more like Himself. If there is not real metal among the dross, there would be no use for the fire, and no result from the burning.

Does not this explain why we see many un-

christian sufferers come out of affliction no better than they were before? Not every fire is a Refiner's fire; and not everything that goes into a fire is purified. Some men come out of the fire of suffering as bricks come out of the brick-kiln, the harder for the burning. Because there is no gold in them, there is nothing to refine. The comfort of feeling that the fire is really a refining one belongs only to the children of the kingdom. But in them it is always seen that sore trial makes common Christians into uncommon saints, and fits them for being used in uncommon service. The men whose names now stand for the finest types of heroic godliness were all men who had some severe discipline of suffering to undergo. Only great trials made them the great saints they became.

Schubert said that of all his compositions the best had been written in days when he had most suffering to endure. The same may be said of David's Psalms and Paul's Epistles. The best and most helpful of the Psalms were written in the heart's blood mingled with tears. The richest and most comforting of Paul's Epistles came from an underground dungeon in Rome. So, still, deep suffering may be giving to many not only a richer personal experience of Christ's infinite grace, and a truer sympathy with other sufferers, but also a larger power for service, and

opportunities of usefulness which perhaps they would have altogether missed had their sufferings been less.

Some who are in the fining-pot of trial are tempted to complain, and ask how a loving God can find it in His heart to make them suffer so : but they know not what their loss would be if the fire should be put out, or even be suffered to cool. We do not see how present sorrow can be blessing at the end : but can any man see Canaan while still in Egypt ? or Elim while still encamped at Marah ? Trust God to make no mistakes. Let Him take His own way and His own wise time, and the completion of the work will justify the process, and fill the lips with song.

The apostle Peter, who knew well from experience what he was speaking about, put this whole matter into short compass when he said, " That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Are we willing to be thus refined ? willing to have the very last remains of dross purged out of us ? Then, nothing is more certain than this, that, as we look down from the peacefulness of heaven to the long sore discipline of earthly

days, we shall bless Him with full hearts for the
“fining-pot” and for the “fire.”

Pain's furnace-heat within me quivers ;
God's breath upon the flame doth blow ;
And all my heart in anguish shivers,
And trembles at the fiery glow :
And yet I whisper, “ As God will ” ;
And in His hottest fire am still.

JULIUS STURM.

SUNSHINE ON THE CLOUD

see also 1.132

Darkness
leading

The way is dark, my Father : cloud on cloud
Is gathering thickly o'er my head, and loud
The thunder roars above me. See, I stand
Like one bewildered ; Father, take my hand,
And through the gloom lead safely home
Thy child.

The way is dark, my child, but leads to light ;
I would not have thee always walk by sight.
My dealings now thou canst not understand ?
I meant it so—but I will take thy hand,
And through the night lead up to light
My child.

The Changed Cross.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee,
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

G. MATHESON.

VI

SUNSHINE ON THE CLOUD

THE rainbow is one of the most beautiful things God ever made, and His causing it to shine out on Noah just when his apprehension of further judgment was filling him with fear was one of the most beautiful things God ever did. The tender thoughtfulness of that sign of mercy comforted Noah, and it has comforted thousands since. It was in a beautifully human way, too, that God spoke of it: "When I bring a cloud over the earth, the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and *I will look upon it*, and remember my covenant." ¹ God's eyes and our eyes looking on the same thing at the same moment—that is a beautiful thought; but there is a more comforting one still, that He sees the bow where our weak and blind eyes do not see it at all.

This bow of covenant mercy spans the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation, resting, at one

¹ Gen. ix. 14.

end, on the sodden earth of Ararat, at the other on the glowing throne of heaven, and over-arching all the space between. We see it in the consoling words, eighteen hundred years after the Flood, "As I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee";¹ and after another eight hundred years we see it in the vision of the rapt apostle John, "A Throne was set in heaven, and One sat upon the Throne, and there was a rainbow round about the Throne, in sight like unto an emerald":² the old sign of God's eternal faithfulness thus appearing in heaven itself. This rainbow round the Throne differed from all others in having only one colour instead of seven; and yet that difference only brings out the meaning of it more distinctly. For we must read Bible symbols with Eastern and not Western eyes; and, in Oriental thought, green is the universally accepted emblem of faithfulness and truth. Man's faithfulness to God has always been a miserable failure. The best saints have failed, the noblest patriarchs, the holiest apostles have failed; but God's faithfulness to His own promises has never failed, and never can.

Is there not here a great message of peace and

¹ Isa. liv. 9.

² Rev. iv. 3.

hope for all suffering hearts ? We would all fain have rainbows without clouds ; but we cannot. The sun needs a dark cloud to print its colours on, and God needs a dark background of sorrow to make His love shine out to view. The darker the cloud, the brighter is the bow : and one reason why He so often lets clouds grow heavier and darker over us is just to make us see His love as a more undeniable and conspicuous thing.

A beautiful illustration of this can be found in the history of that sorely tried patriarch Jacob. A thick cloud came down upon him when his beloved Rachel died, and Joseph was stolen and supposed to be dead too. Then, on the back of these griefs, came another still. There was a famine in the land. Death seemed to be waiting for him and all his house. There *was* a bow upon the cloud even then, and *God* was looking upon it, but Jacob could not see it. It was too faint for his tear-dimmed eyes to distinguish ; and the reason of that was that the cloud was not yet dark enough to show it. So God proceeded to make it darker still. Jacob has to send his sons into Egypt for bread. They are long in coming back. He is full of disquietude and alarm. By-and-by they return, but only to tell him that they had to leave Simeon behind in prison, and that the ruler of Egypt spoke roughly to them, and demanded Benjamin too.

The poor old patriarch breaks down on hearing this. He could not part with Benjamin, the son he loved best of all ; and he cries, " I will not have the cloud become any darker than it is, Benjamin shall not go." But God means that the cloud *shall* become denser still. Benjamin has to be sent away, the aged father's heart almost breaking as he says, " Ye will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave ; all these things are against me."

For many a weary week thereafter the cloud gets thicker and thicker, till, at last, when hope is almost gone, the sun shines out, and against the thickest darkness of all the bow is seen. " Joseph is yet alive," they tell him ; and he well-nigh faints with joy. The bow is so bright it almost dazzles his eyes : but, the more steadily he looks, the clearer becomes his conviction that instead of all things being " against him," all things had been " working together " for a higher good than he had ever imagined could be his. He looked at last where God had been looking all along, and then he gained what he might have had long before, the peace of a heart that was letting God take His own way with it, and resting in Him. All the time that he had been looking on his sorrows alone, his faithful God had been planning for the appearing of the bow. So it ever is.

“In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment,” *there is the cloud*—“but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy upon thee,” ¹ *there is the bow*. “I will visit their transgressions with a rod,” *there is the cloud*—“nevertheless my loving kindness I will not take away, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail,” ² *there is the bow*. “Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died,” *there was the cloud*—“Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” ³ *there was the bow*. “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” *there is the cloud*—“but be of good cheer, in me ye shall have peace,” ⁴ *there is the bow*. “What I do thou knowest not now,” *there is the cloud*—“but thou shalt know hereafter,” ⁵ *there is the bow*. “Ye now therefore have sorrow,” *there is the cloud*—“but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice,” ⁶ *there is the bow*. No cloud whatever, either of sin or of sorrow, can be overhead that is not brightened by an assurance of God’s all-pardoning Grace and all-sufficing Peace.

There is no blessing in affliction till the love of God is seen shining on it. The cloud does not produce the rainbow without the sun; but when we see the brilliant arch that spans the cloud, we see what glorifies the cloud, and we cease to

¹ Isa. liv. 8.

² Ps. lxxxix. 33.

³ John xi. 40.

⁴ John xvi. 33.

⁵ John xiii. 7.

⁶ John xvi. 32.

think of the cloud, we see only the bow. Looking at the Love that overarches sorrow, the sorrow almost disappears; it is "turned into joy." Sometimes, indeed, we can scarcely see the bow, it is too dim and indistinct; but the brightness increases just as the cloud gets more intensely dark. Perhaps this is the reason why God so often thickens our clouds till they become black as night. Only let us realise that though our eyes cannot see the brightness God's eye does; *He* is always looking on it, and is "ever mindful of His covenant."

What a wealth of spiritual suggestiveness lies also in the fact that the rainbow, as seen by us, is only *half the circle*, and in so far is incomplete. But the reason for that is that we are looking at it from the level of the earth. Those who have seen it from a high mountain-peak, and those who have seen it when voyaging in the upper air, with clouds below them as well as above, have told us that as they saw it, the circle was *complete*. Carrying this thought with us as we read again the words, "there was a rainbow *round about* the Throne," does it not suggest the truth that whereas, here on earth, we cannot see the whole compass of God's love, when lifted higher and made to sit in heavenly places we shall see all that is now hidden from our view, shall "know even as also we are known"? O

sorrowing hearts, wait till you get higher up, and all apparent imperfection in the love of God will wholly disappear ! But this is kept as a glad surprise for the heavenly eye, the eye that can look upon the Love of God from the very centre of that Love, the Throne of Jesus Christ.

It is worth remembering, too, how often we fear the dark clouds that are coming near, and yet can praise God for them after they have passed ; for they have not broken in judgment, but "in blessings on our head." Looking at them after they have gone down into the calm golden west, with the sunshine filling them through and through, they seem only like garments of angels thrown off upon the purple sky. How often, with the first symptoms of some grave bodily disease, there is a nameless dread, and the dread increases as the symptoms become more unmistakable ! but how often, as the malady goes on, there comes a sweet acquiescence in the will of God, and His angels come and minister around the bed of pain ! So with the threatened crushing of fondest hopes, or the clear certainty that those we love must die, we shudder and start, and ask frantically if the dark misery cannot be averted yet. When the tear falls from a mother's eye as she looks on the wasted face of her child, and listens to its breathing, and realises for the first time that a stronger arm

than hers is drawing her little darling away ; when a woe-stricken husband sees the dear face he has loved so long grow paler and thinner every day, and marks the anguish that she herself would fain conceal, these clouds are so thick and dark that it seems impossible they can ever be brightened even by God Himself. And yet how many a tear-dimmed eye has seen the bow upon them after all, and discovered, ere long, that Love Divine was behind the darkness, only waiting for the right moment to reveal its consoling power !

The truth is that God cannot give us His best till we are willing calmly to accept His worst. Even Divine power cannot draw the full Christ-likeness in us except by the deep shadows that bring out the light. It was complete ignorance of the laws of art that made Queen Elizabeth demand that the artist should paint her portrait without any shadows on the canvas ; and she got royally angry with him when he told her it could not be done. Alas ! how many of us get angry with God for the same reason, and with as little excuse !

One of the old Psalms says of God that " He maketh the clouds His chariot " ; and it is in that dark chariot that He often pays visits to His dearest friends ; but, dark-looking as it is, what was said of Solomon's chariot is always

true of His : " The midst thereof is paved with love." Come then when He may in the dark cloud, it is always Love He brings along with Him, nay it is *Love that brings Him* to the darkened heart. *He* is not clothed in black though His chariot is, for it is a love-visit that He pays. And even though His last visit of all should be in a chariot of cloud, that will be only a love-visit too, a joyful coming to take His children home from school, to be "for ever with the Lord."

O Thou Who art our life,
Be with us through the strife ;
Thy holy head by earth's fierce storms was bowed :
Raise Thou our eyes above,
To see a Father's love
Beam, like the bow of promise, through the cloud.
SARAH E. MILES.

“EVEN SO, FATHER ”

O Thou whose sacred feet have trod
The thorny path of woe,
Forbid that I should slight the rod,
Or faint beneath the blow.

Give me the spirit of Thy trust,
To suffer as a son ;
To say, though lying in the dust,
Father ! Thy will be done !

J. D. BURNS.

O Blessed life ! the heart at rest
When all without tumultuous seems,
That trusts a Higher Will, and deems
That Higher Will the wisest, best.

W. T. MATSON.

VII

“EVEN SO, FATHER”

THE largest part of the Heavenly Father's training of His children consists in teaching them joyful obedience to His *commanding* will ; but a very large part of it consists also in teaching them joyful acquiescence in His *disposing* will : and Jesus, as the perfect Son, was a bright example of both.

In Matthew's gospel we read : “ In that hour Jesus answered, and said, I thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.”¹ Who did He “ answer ” ? Was it a voice from heaven ? or from the disciples ? or from the crowd ? Was it not rather a voice from His own questioning heart ? He was feeling a perfectly human disappointment with the poor result of His mission as yet, the meagre response the world was making to His love, and

¹ Matt. xi. 26.

He was asking Himself, "Why should this be so?" But He instantly answered His own question by one all-sufficing upward look of absolute trust in the Father who had sent Him.

The Lord Jesus was standing there, as we have often to stand, face to face with the unexplained will of God; but His attitude to that will was not what ours so often is, an attitude of criticism or complaint; it was an attitude of joyful acquiescence. If a shade of disappointment passed for a moment over His human heart, the same moment the calming thought rose up, "It is my Father's will alone with which I have to do, I will trust that will to the uttermost," and immediately the trust broke out into thanksgiving and praise.

There is our Example, when confronted with the disappointments of life. Too often we let these things embitter us, and, if we do not actually accuse God of injustice, we come perilously near to that in the spirit of our lamentations.

Occasionally there may be faint gleams of light in the darkness; some merciful reasons can be guessed at for the blight of hope, reasons sufficient to steady us a little, if not to bring us perfect peace. But often there is not even so much as this. There is nothing to relieve the heart-perplexity, all is uncheered gloom, without and within. Just then it is that the example

of Jesus becomes our greatest help. When, with all our intentness of looking, we cannot see one ray of light, cannot discover either what we have been chastened for or what good the chastening can do, there is still one thing left for the wounded heart to do—and that the best thing of all—to fall back, even weeping, upon the Smiter's heart of love, and say, "Even so, Father, for so it has seemed good in Thy sight."

These were the humblest, holiest, most reverential, most adoring words that were ever uttered in this world: and what we need when confronted with unexplained disappointments in life is just to echo them. They stand higher even than those other words, "Not my will but Thine be done," for in these there is struggle as well as victory, but here the two wills are running in the same plane. What we need is not to have no will—that would not be human; not to have a rebellious will conquered—that is not enough; but to have our will absorbed, lost in God's will, so completely absorbed that His will and our will shall be absolutely the same. This is one of the greatest things God can teach us, and, if we are indeed His children, He will not cease the teaching till the lesson has been learned thoroughly.

We are staggered, sometimes, as we look around, by the strange way in which His Provi-

dence runs counter not only to what we expect, but to all that we think right and good. Why is one home overwhelmed by a constant succession of sorrows, year after year, while other homes beside it are completely exempt? Why does misfortune pursue one man constantly, do what he will, while other men—not more upright, not more prudent, not more sagacious, not more God-fearing than he—perhaps far less—have unbroken prosperity from first to last? Why does the hand of death so often smite the strong and spare the weak? Why are the young cut down just as all the possibilities of a useful life are opening out before them? Why does God, who seemed to have been specially preparing them for His service, suddenly prevent their entering on it, while the aged whose working powers are gone are left lying for years in uselessness, like stranded hulks embedded in the sand, and falling to pieces inch by inch? Why is the parent taken away just when helpless little ones most need a father's or a mother's care? or children cut down just when they are twining themselves most firmly around a parent's heart? Why does the stroke of death so often take away just the friend most beloved of all, and most essential to the happiness of the home? If some stroke be needed, why should it be one so terribly heavy, so inexpressibly severe?

We ask these questions, and reason cannot answer them: only faith can do it, the faith that trusts where it cannot see, and, lifting a tear-stained face to the face of God, says, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

That was how the faith of Jesus responded to the mystery of God's holy will: and He gives us the key to His calmness in the one word "Father." When He lifted up His eyes to look to the heavenly side of the mystery, He saw the "Lord of heaven and earth" doing His inscrutable will; but He saw far more than that. The face that He saw was not merely the face of a *Sovereign*, it was the face of a *Father*. The high will of God He saw to be a Father's will. "My Father Who is Love itself can be arranging for me only that which is best" was the deepest conviction and the deepest rest of His heart. He "knew the Father" as none other did, and therefore He could trust Him to the uttermost. We too, in our poor measure, may "know the Father," and, in exact proportion as we do, our reason for calm trust will not be that we understand His ways, but that we understand Himself.

The apostle John could say to the suffering Christians of his day, "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father."¹ Could he say that to many of us, if he were

¹ 1 John ii. 13.

amongst us here to-day? But all tears will quickly be dried upon the face that is always looking, as Christ's was, upon the face of the *Father* who is in heaven.

One prayer I have—all prayers in one—
Since I am wholly Thine ;
Thy blessed will, O God, be done,
And let Thy will be mine !

THE MAN OF SORROWS

What grace, O Lord, and beauty shone
 Around Thy steps below !
What patient love was seen in all
 Thy life and death of woe !

For ever on Thy burdened heart
 A weight of sorrow hung ;
Yet no ungentle murmuring word
 Escaped Thy silent tongue.

E. DENNY.

Lord, as to Thy dear cross we flee,
 And plead to be forgiven,
So let Thy life our pattern be,
 And form our souls for heaven.

G. H. GURNEY.

VIII

THE MAN OF SORROWS

“**A** MAN of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”¹—that was one of the signs by which Israel was to know its Christ; and only the blindness of the eyes that looked on Jesus of Nazareth prevented the recognition. It was one of the glories and consolations of His Christhood that He came amongst men and lived amongst them to the last, as one familiar with everything belonging to the sunless side of life, its trials and its temptations, its deprivations and its disappointments, its hardships and its tears: and in the patient endurance and triumphant faith of our Great Lord there are stars of hope that light up the darkness of our own midnight skies. He foresaw that we would need these helps, and He knew that they would suffice. “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” but “it is enough for the servant that he be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord,” “If

¹ Isa. liii. 3.

they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of His household?"¹ Surely many disciples cannot be taking this lesson home, else they would not be so full of amazed dejection, and even of rebellion, under the weight of their cross, as they often are.

^T ^{We} You complain, perhaps, of ^{we} your low position in life. ^{We} You had no good start, ^{we} your early advantages were miserably few, ^{we} your career was heavily handicapped from the very first. But were ^{we} you really born lower down than ^{we} your Master was, when He, the Crown and glory of heaven, humbled Himself as no angel ever did, and was born among the beasts of burden in the stable of an inn?

^{We} You complain, perhaps, of the hard usage ^{we} you have to endure at the hands of other men. But can ^{we} your life-lot compare for a moment in this respect with the life-lot of ^{we} your Lord? Occasionally men did seem to honour Him, but when they crowded round Him it was only to get, and not to give. Rich men, now and then, asked Him to a feast, but not to show any love to Him, only to gratify their own self-importance; for, as Christ clearly saw, beneath the mask of hospitality there was only a poor curiosity or patronising pride. He subsisted for years on the charity of a few who "ministered to Him

¹ Matt. x. 25.

of their substance"; He spoke of Himself as being less home-nurtured than the foxes of the desert or the fowls of the air: and yet He made no complaint. He took all that as the lot appointed for Him, and accepted it uncomplainingly as His Father's will. Can ^{we} you put the Master's experience alongside of ~~y~~our own, and say, "I am worse off than my Redeemer was"?

Do ^{we} you say, "There are sufferings in my lot far harder to bear than these; studied insults, slanders, and affronts, the venom'd shafts of malicious tongues, accusing me secretly of what I know to be absolutely false"? Well, how was it with Christ? Is there anything that can try the temper which He had not to endure? His purest motives were wilfully misconstrued. His gracious miracles of love were ascribed to the power of the devil. He was calumniated as a revolutionary and a blasphemer. He was slandered as a glutton and a drunkard. The most contumelious epithets were hurled at Him day after day. And yet no word of anger escaped His lips when treated so. He did not even say, either to accuser or to disciple, that it was very hard He should have such things to bear. He calmly accepted the shame, and "committed Himself to Him who judgeth righteously."

Surely there is comfort here for those disciples still, whose sufferings are due only to their

faithful loyalty to Him, a loyalty which exposes them both to the hatred of the world and to petty persecutions and mockeries at the hands of their friends. Very clearly did the Master forewarn His disciples that they would not have popularity in the world, any more than He: "If they have hated me they will also hate you," "I am come to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter against her mother . . . and a man's foes shall be they of his own household." ¹ However acute this kind of suffering may be, it need not take us by surprise. It is in the programme of the Kingdom.

It would be easy to escape it by treachery to our Lord; for, if we never disturb the world by any practical protest against its sins, we ~~will~~ *shall* not only be unmolested, but be admired as being full of charity, free from all narrow-mindedness, beautiful patterns of what Christians ought to be! But true confessors of the unworldly Christ the world will not endure. It will hate and defame and persecute them still just as it did nineteen hundred years ago; and if its weapons are not fire and sword, they are weapons of even keener edge, and whose wounds go deeper far.

What comfort has Christ for disciples suffering so? First of all, He says that such suffering only proves that they belong to Him, "because

¹ Matt. x. 35.

I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." If they are not spared the *pain* of defamation, they are not denied the *blessing* of it, which is a clearer assurance that they are really "His own." Further, they are thus only proving their pedigree, showing that they are in the long and glorious line of witnesses whose record is on high: "So persecuted they the prophets that were before you." And again, cross-bearing here leads surely to crown-wearing by-and-by. "Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." Five minutes of heaven will more than compensate for fifty years of suffering here.

There is still another region of experience in which the thought of the Man of Sorrows becomes an infinite consolation, the sufferings that cannot be traced to man's malevolence, but come directly from the hand of God Himself. Can Christ's example help us in such things as these? In this way it can—by reminding us that the sorest of all His afflictions were those that could be traced only to the smiting hand of His Father in heaven. Why did He cry out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, *He* hath put Him to grief," is the only reply. The sting of

his last sorrow was not that men were reviling Him, nor that disciples were forsaking Him, but that God seemed to be casting Him off. He had known sorrows that came from earth; He had also known sorrows that came from hell; but the last and deepest sorrow was one that came to Him from heaven: it was the cry of a soul that felt itself abandoned and cast away. How many of His disciples have passed through that experience too, but passed through it, as Christ did, into the calm of victory! Do you say, "I could bear easily any other grief than this, but the face of God is hid, I get no answer to my prayers, my hope is gone, I am forsaken and cast away"? Ah, poor soul! these were the very feelings of your Lord upon the cross, and even though you too have to wail out your "*Lama sabachthani*" into the ear of your hidden God, you are not any more a castaway than your Redeemer was; for never was that Son more inexpressibly dear to the Father's heart or more intensely loved than just when He felt as if shut out from that love for ever.

Men have been known to carry charms or amulets as protections against all ills. Here is a charm which, if we take it, and wear it next the heart, will be an infallible exorcism against all faint-heartedness and fear—*Think of Christ*: and whenever you feel dejected because of the

troubles of life, say to yourself, "If He was tried and tempted in all points like as I am, how near that brings Him to me, and me to Him!" Poor wounded soul! as you grope your way through the tangled briars, bleeding afresh at every step, will it not comfort you to see, on the blood-stained grass, signs that Another Sufferer had been there before you, to discover Who that Other was by recognising the foot-prints of your Lord Himself, and then to feel that "in every pang that rends the heart, the Man of Sorrows had a part"? What a heart His is to lean upon! What a Pattern of holy trust is His to copy!

The soul and the Saviour are divinely fitted, each to each. He finds in sorrow His opportunity: sorrow finds in Him its rest. Following Him, we learn how to rise *above* our sorrows into the calm of *faith*; and how to get, at last, *beyond* them into the calm of *Heaven*.

O Thou who died'st to give us life,
Full well to Thee is known
The Cross, and all the inner strife
Of those who weep alone,
And 'neath their burden well-nigh faint:
The aching heart's unspoken plaint
Finds echo in Thine own.

PAUL GERHARDT.

THE DRUDGERY OF COMMON LIFE

as

Valley /

Not on the towering mountain-peak
Crest-crowned with fiery glow
Do men the earth's rich harvests seek,
But in deep vales below.

Not for some glaring high emprise
Seek thou far-soaring wings ;
That faith is noblest in God's eyes
That bears a cross—and sings.

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IX

THE DRUDGERY OF COMMON LIFE

I N writing words of comfort to weary hearts, there is one large class whose burdens cannot be overlooked, those who are weighed down not by any acute suffering of body but by the dreary monotony of the daily round, the small household duties or petty cares that absorb all time and energy, leave almost no room for higher things, and yet show no great result when all is done. Multitudes of these weary hearts are every day chafing under their limitations, and longing wistfully for some lifting of the load, not so much for the sake of personal relief from drudgery as that they may fulfil more nobly the higher purposes of life. They would fain do more for the glory of God in active usefulness to men, but they are chained to daily tasks that seem to shut them out from all opportunities of service, and make their life look poor, and profitless, and mean.

Very few people do really believe that they

are in their right position. Has not every one of us a dream or vision of some happier and nobler lot that might have been ours? and do we not sometimes think that it ought to have been ours? Sometimes we beat against our prison-bars with a silent but deep heart-bitterness; and sometimes we let our limitations depress us to the verge of hopelessness, and life becomes only one long weariness and pain.

But has God no use for us just where we are? Has He dealt unfairly or unkindly in putting us where we are? One thing, at least, is certain, that if we do not serve our Lord and Master where we are, we would not serve Him better anywhere else. If it is He who has placed us in this narrow and mean-looking sphere, He knows it is the best of all places for us to occupy, and He wants us to glorify Him by patient obedience there. What He said to Israel long ago about their forty years in the dreary stretches of Arabian sand, He is saying to us when we complain of that cribbed and hampered and depressing experience which is our present lot: "I am training thee to suffer that I may afterwards honour thee to rule, training thee to be content with obscurity that I may hereafter make thee shine, training thee to be faithful in those things that are least, that thou mayest be fit for the great things by-and-by." And if

there is one thing more than another, of a practical kind, which we as Christian men and women need to learn, it is this, that a devotion to God which can adorn and sanctify the hardest drudgery of life is not only a more difficult but a far more honourable thing than that which flares out only upon high occasions. Let weary and discouraged hearts look up! The Lord of our lives makes no mistakes. He gives each one of us the right place to fill, the right work to do, the right load to bear, the right help in bearing it, and the right reward at last for all that is faithfully, however obscurely, done for Him.

These poor prosaic duties, these common-place surroundings, these daily self-denials are God's choice for you. They are the instruments of your heavenly education, the channels of His grace, the sacraments of His love. That place to which you are chained, that grimy city, that narrow lodging, that dingy office, that dull shop, that dreary street, that uncongenial company—these are the school for your training, and the altar for your sacrifice, according to the will of God. Believe that; take them so, and as you look upon them again, bright proofs of your Father's love in one and all of them will turn your weariness into peace.

The same may be said of other kinds of dis-

appointment in life. The disappointed are a great host, and their disappointments are not confined to outward things. There are disappointed affections too. How many are doomed to live lonely lives while the heart is craving the closer companionships of love! How many are shut out, by no fault of theirs, from the deepest and purest companionship the heart can know! How often "a happy wedding" means that some other man has missed the bride he dreamt of, or that some other woman has missed the bridegroom of her secret hopes! Yet those who have to tread a solitary path need neither be unlovable nor unloved. In truth, they are often exactly the reverse, and gain the unstinted affection of many to whom they bring their angel-ministries of cheer. Their love, less centred upon one, expands to bless the many, who would not otherwise have known how tender and how self-sacrificing love can be.

As I write this chapter I think of one of the simplest, sincerest, and most lovable Christians I ever knew, who often felt discouraged because home-duties so circumscribed her opportunities for wider usefulness. Thrilled by what she read of the noble services rendered to Christ by devoted women at home and abroad, she would sigh and say, "But I am doing nothing at all." She did not repine, but she felt saddened by the

thought. And yet, all the time, she did not know how great a blessing she was, and how her own beautiful life was brightening other lives beside her. She was her husband's daily strength, as well as daily joy. She made her home one of the happiest and sunniest on earth. She trained her children to love all purest and noblest things. She taught them righteousness and sympathy, and self-sacrifice and truth, till every one of them rose up to call her blessed. And she did far more than that. She was a succourer of many outside the home, though she hardly realised how many sorrowers she cheered, how many of the poor thanked God for her as the best earthly friend they had, how lovingly unselfish her whole life was, and how its shining light led many to seek her Saviour as their own. That was her daily ministry, quiet, hid greatly from the world's eye, but a ministry of blessing from first to last.

I think, too, of many other likeminded saintly souls, hardly known outside of their own immediate neighbourhood, who bear sickness in solitude, who are burdened with care from one year's end to another, whose life is one long weariness of spirit, with almost nothing of what the world would call comfort or success ; but who are bearing sweetly and patiently the trials of their lot, content if they please the Unseen

Lord, who has given them only very humble and small things to please Him in, and are daily, amid the most depressing circumstances, showing the beauty, and diffusing the fragrance, of truly consecrated souls.

I think of these, and of their exceeding multitude, for there are far more of them than we know: I think of how they will be welcomed by the angels into the sorrowless land, and will shine out there brighter than the stars; and then I think of what the Lord and Master said, "There are last that shall be first, and there are first that shall be last."

We need as much the cross we bear
As air we breathe, as light we see;
It brings us to Thy feet in prayer,
It binds us to our Strength in Thee.

" THY HIDDEN ONES "

Rehearsal
As chiselled image unresisting lies
In niche by its own Sculptor's hand designed,
So to my unemployed and silent life
Let me in quiet meekness be resigned.

If works of faith and labours sweet of love
May not be mine, yet patient hope may be
Within my heart like a bright censer's fire
With incense of thanksgiving mounting free.

Thou art our Pattern to the end of time
O Crucified ! and perfect is Thy will ;
The workers follow Thee in doing good,
The helpless think of Calvary, and are still.

CAROLINE M. NOEL.

"THY HIDDEN ONES"

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THIS is one of the most beautiful expressions in the whole Bible, and it is found only in the eight-third Psalm. The same idea is everywhere, but nowhere else is it so tersely and beautifully expressed. It suggests safety, on the one hand, and concealment, on the other ; and the concealment is often in order to the safety.

The whole history of the Church is an illustration of this. Noah was one of God's hidden saints, when the door of the ark was closed, and the Lord shut him in. The hundred prophets whom the good Obadiah concealed from Ahab in two caves and fed daily there were really God's hidden ones : and so also were the Scottish Covenanters who found themselves often saved from the pursuit of the dragoons on mountain moors by the sudden descent of a thick mist in the kindly folds of which they were completely hid. They were kept from the enemy's hand by being kept from the enemy's eye.

And there are many of these hidden ones in the world still, hidden from notice in the obscurity of poverty or of sickness, shut in with their own weaknesses and sorrows, shut out from all the world's work, hardly known to any but the Lord Himself, and yet finding in that concealment a safety from many dangers they could hardly otherwise escape. One might almost say that the largest number of God's saints on earth are, in this sense, His hidden ones. There are very many earnest Christians in the busy highways of life, and many in life's high positions of honour too. But these are never obscure. They are seen of all. Their light shines from lofty candlesticks, and casts its radiance far and wide. They force the attention of the world to their discipleship by the conspicuousness of their position. But the largest number of Christ's disciples are not only lower down but very much lower down in the social scale. "Not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith": and yet how seldom are their riches seen! However ardent their devotion to Christ may be, they have few opportunities of showing it. They sometimes long for the treasures of wealth so recklessly squandered by others, that they might use them in the service of their beloved Lord and Master: but the world's riches lie, for the most part, in

the hands of worldly men, and where there is the spirit that would use them for Christ there is nothing to use. Thousands of God's children are thus shrouded in obscurity—His hidden ones.

And yet they are often among the finest of His saints. They remind us of the sweet flowers that bloom in shady nooks, which only God and the angels see ; or of the desert melon that sends its fragrance across the sand, though not one human foot in half a century may pass that way ; or of those plain old-fashioned clocks one sometimes sees in a humble cottage, the outer case age-worn and grimed, but standing in the same dim corner year after year, with their slow, monotonous, heavy click, yet doing their duty quietly, faithfully, and well. How many a bright Christian soul is hidden under a thatched roof, unknown on earth but well known in heaven, unpraised by men but crowned by the loving approbation of God !

What wonderful surprises there will be in the All-revealing Day, when God Who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness also brings to light the humble saints whom the darkness had long concealed ! Among the many bright hopes that cluster round the day of Christ's appearing, there is none brighter than this, that it will be the Day of "the manifestation of the sons of

God." ¹ The redemption of His chosen ones? Yes. The quickening of His buried ones? Yes. The gathering of His scattered ones? Yes. The crowning of His struggling ones? Yes. The gladdening of His sorrowful ones? Yes, all that, but this as well, the manifestation of His hidden ones.

We need not complain of obscurity now. Shadow is often shelter. The flowers that bloom in the shade would be killed by the frosts of the open and the glare of a burning sun. The shadow of obscurity and even the darker shadow of long suffering may be only sheltering from unsuspected peril some of the finest and sweetest flowers in the garden of God; and when the need of the shadow for their safety is past, they will be revealed in the beauty that, under the shadow, they had gained. Do not murmur at your obscurity: think rather, with chastened joy, how God, in tender love, may be sheltering you there from dangers to your soul that full sunshine would have brought.

Do you still think your lowly obscurity hard to bear? Then look at your great Master, Christ. Twenty-eight years He spent in the secluded life of a humble home in Nazareth, without any opportunity of being, as He might have been, the Teacher of listening crowds.

¹ Rom. viii. 19.

Why this long hiding of a Light that might have been shining over all the land? Was He not "learning obedience by the things which He suffered"? learning to wait, learning contentment with obscurity, learning resignation to the Father's will concerning Him, and learning, too, to sympathise with those who are compelled to inaction though their hearts are burning to do great things for God? What a rebuke to our complaints of restriction to narrow spheres, of the shutting up of our powers in obscure positions, and what a rebuke, too, to our envious looks at other men, not more highly gifted than ourselves but raised to higher positions of influence in the world, or in the church—what a rebuke to think of the Lord from heaven, for eight-and-twenty years (eight-and-twenty out of only thirty-three) buried, lost to sight, waiting in willingness to be overlooked, watching for the eye of God, and for the pointings of His hand, obeying as simply and as rejoicingly as the waiting watchful angels obey in heaven!

Out of that circumscribed secluded life in a humble village home came the perfect obedience unto death that, on Calvary, redeemed the world: and our Nazareths, too, may become the best school for our Jerusalems, if there we learn to be completely satisfied with the will of God concerning us, whatever that will may be.

Christ entered life at a low level, and on that low level He lived patiently and joyfully from first to last. If even He chose to live thus near the bottom of human life, such living must have in it something divinely good. That way lies the very gate of heaven. To be merely "hidden ones" may not of itself be joy; but to be *God's* hidden ones, hidden by Him and hidden for Him, and hidden with Him—is there any joy greater than that?

Sweet lives pass on ; the world may never miss them,
And souls, though bright, may shed no dazzling ray ;
But God will know exactly where to find them
When He makes up His jewels in His Day.

A. P. O'DONOGHUE.

PERILS IN THE DARK

Principalities and powers
Mustering their unseen array
Wait for thy unguarded hours ;
Watch and pray.

Gird thy heavenly armour on,
Wear it ever, night and day ;
Ambushed lies the evil one ;
Watch and pray.

CHARLOTTE ELLIOT.

The land of trouble and anguish, out of which come the
young and the old lion, the viper, and the fiery flying serpent.
Isa. xxx. 6.

XI

PERILS IN THE DARK

DARKNESS has its discomforts, but it has its dangers too. "Thou makest darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth."¹ In the kingdom of nature that is true; in the region of soul-experience it is equally true. When any deep darkness of trouble or sorrow falls upon the life, it falls also upon the heart, and all the latent evils of the heart begin to stir—hard thoughts of God, bitter anger at men who have been the real or supposed causes of the sorrow and the wrong, soured petulance of spirit, doubts of everything, unbelief, despair.

And it is not from within alone that danger assails. All manner of evil thoughts are suggested by the devil too. "Darkness is always peopled by phantoms," do you say? "it is all an affair of shaken nerves"; nay, it is far more than that. It is a mysterious but undoubted

¹ Ps. civ. 20.

part of New Testament teaching that we are surrounded by invisible powers of darkness watching to shake our faith in God, even as their prince essayed to shake the faith of God's Eternal Son. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world,"¹ and suggestions of evil come to us from without as well as from within. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," yes, but man's extremity is the devil's opportunity too. He comes with his subtle temptations when we are too weakened to fight, just as he waited, ere tempting Christ, till he found Him alone in a wilderness, faint with hunger after a fast of forty days. He attacks us as Amalek attacked Israel, not daring to assail the strong, but "smiting the hindmost, even all that were feeble, and faint and weary." His evil hosts are thus like the wild untameable beasts of the forest that hardly dare to show themselves by day, but creep forth at night, prowling around to find some unguarded door or window through which to make a fatal spring: and sometimes they do get in!

John Bunyan knew well how these assaults of the wicked one are made upon the pilgrim most of all when he is in the "Valley of Humiliation." "It is a dangerous place," said Great-

¹ Eph. vi. 12.

heart, "for there Christian met Apollyon, a monster with wings like a dragon, and feet like a bear, and a mouth like a lion": and many a pilgrim before and since could tell of the same experience falling to him when in the same low and lonely valley of sorrow.

What can be done to keep these crafty assailants at bay? One thing only—Flash upon them God's light of Grace and Truth and Peace! They are creatures of the darkness, and will not face that light of His. Have you ever noticed that in all the story of the long wanderings of Israel we never read of any harm done to them by the wild beasts that roamed the desert sands? How so? Was it not just because the "pillar of fire by night" that glowed over all the camp was Israel's sure defence? The wild beasts were all around, but did not dare to touch one of that light-protected host. Israel was *living in the light of God*—by night as well as by day. The Lord was "a wall of fire"¹ all round the camp, as well as a "glory in its midst," and so they were kept in peace.

Exploring travellers, in our own modern days, have often told how, after kindling their fires at nightfall, they have seen the gleaming eyes of wild beasts just outside the circle of light, and have watched the stealthy prowling forms that

¹ Zech. ii. 5.

did not dare to cross it, and how the lamp inside the tent was enough to keep any intruder out. There is your refuge, troubled and tormented heart, against the "terror by night": *live in the light of God*. His love-light is always burning over you—there is no doubt of that: let your own faith-light be also burning clear within, and you need fear nothing. Believe in the Father's unchanging grace, and treat these dark thoughts that trouble you as being only suggestions of the evil one; and they will never shake the perfect peace of the heart that is "stayed on Him."

There is a beautifully tender passage in Ezekiel where God speaks of His loving care for the sheep that are "scattered in the cloudy and dark day." He says: "I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods."¹ Read these words literally, and they have no meaning for the troubled to-day; but read them spiritually, and they are full of divinest consolation. Life sometimes wears the aspect of a dreary wilderness, shelterless, comfortless, bare. Sometimes, again, it is rather like a thick entangling forest, full of perplexities and difficulties, impenetrably dark, shadowed in gloom,

¹ Ezek. xxxiv. 25.

with unseen dangers lurking on every side and filling the heart with strange misgivings and fears.

For both of these conditions the Lord makes perfect provision. As the Lord of peace He makes with all trustful hearts a "covenant of peace." He does not promise to make the wilderness a home for us, for we are only pilgrims through it to the home beyond it; and so He does not speak of our dwelling *comfortably* in the wilderness, but He does speak of our dwelling "safely" there: and yet what a great thing that is—to know and feel that at every step of the pilgrim way, in the darkness as well as in the light, we are absolutely safe, so safe that we can "sleep in the woods," can lie down with quiet hearts, even though, from utter exhaustion, we cannot take another step, and in the utter darkness have not one gleam of light.

King Solomon took the greatest pains to ensure himself untroubled rest: "As for his bed three-score valiant men were about it, every man with his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night";¹ yet, after all, he was not one whit more secure than his father David was beneath the open sky, where, though hunted by a relentless foe, his God was watching over him, and he could sing, "I will both lay me down

¹ Song'iii. 7, 8.

in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety." Do we know anything of what this means? what it is to lie like a little child in the arms of encircling love, and fear nothing?

To an infant resting in its mother's arms, it makes no difference where it is. The wilderness and the forest are the same to it as its most sheltered home. In the darkest night of storm it can sleep as tranquilly as in the calmest day. Its surroundings are nothing to it. All it wants is to feel the enfolding arm, and feeling that, it is utterly content. Does not the Lord make that an emblem of the peace that may be ours, when He says, "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath thee are the everlasting arms"?

I grasp Thy strength, make it my own,
My heart with peace is blest;
I lose my hold, and then comes down
Darkness and cold unrest.

Let me no more my comfort draw
From my frail hold of Thee;
In this alone rejoice with awe,
Thy mighty grasp of me.

J. C. SHARP.

TRANSFIGURED FACES

O Love Divine, that stooped to share
Our deepest pang, our bitterest tear,
On Thee we cast each earth-born care,
We smile at pain while Thou art near.

Though long the weary way we tread,
And sorrow crown each lingering year,
No path we shun, no darkness dread,
Our heart still whispering "Thou art near."
O. W. HOLMES.

XII

TRANSFIGURED FACES

“MY faith looks up to Thee,” says one of our choicest Christian hymns, and that is the safest heart-attitude always. As our chief temptations come from looking *around*, and our chief dangers from looking *down*, so our chief miseries come from looking too far *in front*. We need to learn the blessed art of constantly looking *up*. That is the one panacea for all ills, the one prescription for safety and for peace.

In one of the Psalms, the thirty-fourth, we overhear the thankful reminiscences of a great sufferer who had learned this secret well: “I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.” Who was it that looked? Was it not his “fears”? They had been like a great phantom host crowding round him with down-cast faces, and intensifying his gloom; but he

bade them look up to the God of his salvation, and instantly a transfiguring light from above came over them, and made their faces shine.

Does not many a suffering heart know well how gloom deepens as fears and forebodings press around it, shutting it in upon itself? What are we to do with that host of phantom fears? There is only one thing that will be of any use—bid them look up! and as the transfiguring light of heaven falls upon them, you will not recognise them again.

No other way of meeting *any* kind of trouble will succeed like this. To fight against trouble is vain. Mere stoical resignation to it as to an inevitable fate brings no calm into the heart. The well-meant sympathy of friends who have had little experience of trouble seldom heals the sore. Their platitudes of commiseration—"You do not suffer so much as hundreds at your side," "The load will grow lighter as you get accustomed to the weight," "The longest lane has a turning, and the darkest night a dawn," and other sayings of a like kind—how well we know them! and how profitless they are! They will not do. There is only one thing that will (and God Himself must be the Teacher of it), *to look up and trust*. Get the inward attitude to the trouble changed from fear to faith, and the trouble, though it may not at once

cease to *exist*, will from that moment cease to *torment*.

When there is trouble without and rebellion within, we are in the position of a ship-captain who has to meet a hurricane with a mutinous crew. His worst dangers are in his own ship. And yet how much of this mutinous spirit there is in us all ! It is great folly ; but it is more than that, it is great sin : for it means great forgetfulness of the Father's promises, great distrust of the Father's guidance, and great unbelief of the reality of the Father's love.

How often have our faithless fears been falsified when we only got a little farther on ! That sad-hearted Hebrew mother who gave her young son the doleful name of " Jabez " (the sorrowful) lived to see him grow up the best of all her sons, " more honourable than his brethren,"¹ and to recognise in him the choicest gift she had got from the hands of God. The troubles of life stand round us, and we call them " fears " ; let us look up and wait, and we will call them " blessings " soon. Sad hearts are often peculiarly ingenious in discovering the gloomiest point of view from which to look upon their trials, and they call God's providence by the hardest names ; and yet how many find that what they called " Jabez " at first, turned out

¹ 1 Chron. iv. 10.

ere long to be fuller of mercy than brighter-looking things had ever been !

Only a very simple and confiding faith can believe that this may be so, while the trial is still intense. But childlike hearts that live very close to God have always found it true. There is something like a series of telegraphic signals by which the Spirit of God in the soul communicates with God's providences as they come, recognises them as friends and welcomes them ; while an unbelieving heart only dreads them, puts itself into an attitude of defence against them, and makes them enemies by treating them as such. God gives a calm heart wherever there is a watchful, upward-looking eye.

Any life trouble will cease to worry the moment we look up, recognise the Guiding Hand, and feel that He is teaching us to trust Him utterly, be the outlook perplexing as it may. When two friends are walking arm-in-arm, and one of them wishes to take a path which the other refuses to take, either they must pull in opposite directions or they must separate and walk apart. But God will not let His children separate themselves from Him ; and so, if they struggle against His leading, they have to be dragged. Submitting to be led, the trouble is at an end.

Very beautifully did a great sufferer once express the thought that all God's afflicting

strokes are only His loving attempts to get very close to us, and to keep us very near to Him, when, speaking of her loss in quick succession of father, mother, husband, and child, she said with meek submission and yet with joy, "I see that God wants *all* my heart, and He *shall* have it." That is what He seeks from all of us, and if His uninterrupted goodness does not effect it, His chastenings and afflictions often do. We fear these things at first, but the upward look changes fear into peace.

This Psalm tells us that the upward look must be an upward look of trust, but also an upward look of prayer; and it is chiefly in our deep sorrows that we learn the value of prayer, as bringing us into that calm Presence where nothing but peace reigns. Many a sufferer has learnt this from his own experience. Pressed down by difficulties, he first tried many means of getting free, but tried in vain; till at last he took his burdens and laid them all on the loving heart of his Father in heaven, beginning perhaps with a prayer that the burden might be removed, but soon ceasing to ask anything except that his Father's loving purpose might be fulfilled; and then he found a strange new peace reigning in his soul: and when he thought of his first petition for release, he found that he had almost forgotten what it was! He had been so lifted

up into perfect oneness of feeling with his God, that he ceased to care whether release came or not—for he had got something better far than release could be.

What a resource prayer is for burdened hearts ! and it is always an accessible resource. We may be like the disciples in the dark storm on the lake, but we, too, shall find that a cry in the darkness brings the Master instantly to our aid. It may be too dark to see, too dark to steer, too dark to toil any longer at the oar ; but it is *never too dark to pray*. Praying in the dark may be, like writing in the dark, a little confused ; but He to whom all darkness is as the light will read the meaning easily ; and by-and-by we will make the glad discovery that it is *never too dark to sing*. We will worship the great Calmer of the waves, not only while yet in the boat, but with even greater joy when we are upon the farther shore, and all waves are still, for “ there is no more sea.”

Help
 Come to my help, O Master !—once in sorrow
 My more than brother—King of Glory now ;
 Even in my tears a gleam of hope I borrow
 From the deep scars around Thy radiant brow.

Agony
 Come to my help, as once God's angels hastened
 To cheer Thee in Thy midnight agony ;
 O Lord of angels ! once by suff'ring chastened,
 Forget me not in mine infirmity.


Walk Thou the wave with me, the tempest stilling ;

Let me but feel the clasping of Thy strength—

Thy heavenly strength—through all my pulses thrilling,

I shall not fear to reach the shore at length.

DR. BETHUNE.



SHATTERED HOPES

See also 14.110

Waiting

She waited long on God,
And He forsook not ; through the gloomy vale
She leant upon His staff until His rod
Broke forth in blossoms pale.

Then did her spirit bless
The gracious token ; then she saw the rife
Salt-crusted standing pools of bitterness
Spring up as wells of life.

DORA GREENWELL.

Bitterness

I saw a cup sent down and come to her
Brimful of loathing and of bitterness ;
She drank with livid lips that seemed to stir
The depth, not make it less :

But as she drank I spied a Hand distil
New wine and virgin honey ; making it
First bitter-sweet, then sweet indeed, until
She tasted only sweet.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

L

XIII

SHATTERED HOPES

NOTHING is so hard to bear as disappointed hope. Bitterness in the fountain to which we ran eagerly for relief crushes us more terribly than the absence of any fountain would have done. To find the alluring vision of a gleaming lake to be only a mirage, the reflection of a burning sky upon burning sand, or to find that what is really water is water so bitter that it is like poison in the mouth—there is no experience more depressing than that. We can endure almost anything if we have long been looking it steadily in the face; but disappointment! that is a different thing altogether, and crushes the very life out of us the moment it is met.

A very suggestive picture of this is given us in the story of Israel's experience at Marah's bitter pool.¹ After the marvellous deliverance, and jubilant songs on the shore of the Red Sea, they had set out on pilgrimage with highest

¹ Exod. xv. 23.

hopes, expecting that every onward step would only bring them into fuller peace. And yet three days had not passed when they found themselves almost dying of thirst in a sun-scorched desert where no smallest brook crossed their path. At last, a long line of distant palms showed that water was near; but what an agony of disappointment to find only a bitter, poisonous pool of which none could drink!

Do we wonder at the wild murmurings that arose over all the camp? Scarce one of ourselves but would have murmured too! and God seemed to feel that they could hardly help it, for He did not meet that murmuring with a single word of rebuke. Bearing tenderly with them, just as one would bear with the moaning fretfulness of a sick child, He showed Moses a tree which, being cast into the pool, took all its bitterness away; and the very next day He led them on to a better resting-place, Elim's abundant wells of water pure and sweet.

It is easy for those who have never been severely tried to accuse disappointed sufferers of want of faith. We like to get up a little self-complacency by blaming them, not thinking that, in similar circumstances, we ourselves would fail as quickly as they. You say to such a sufferer, "It is very sinful to let yourself be so fretful, and impatient, and upset." That may be true; but have you

yourself ever tried to go through your daily tasks with an aching head and a bursting heart? Have you always found it easy amid a thousand worries to keep a temper placid and serene? When worn out with nights of sleeplessness and pain, have you always been able to come down in the morning with a smile for every one upon a sunny face? When some one loved as your own life was suddenly threatened with death by fell disease, and an utter crushing of all your hopes of earthly happiness seemed close at hand, were you able to take calmly that shattering of your hopes? were you able to say submissively, "Thy Will be done"? Oh, let us judge our brethren tenderly, with the gentle and sweet compassion of the Lord Himself.

There are many sad disenchantments in life awaiting all of us, if they have not already come. No one will go far on the pilgrim way without having to mutter "Marah" over some anticipated joy, without finding bitter water where he expected sweet. Visions of wealth, fame, honour, home comforts, love—have they always been fulfilled? Have they all been Elims when we reached them? They promised to slake the soul's thirst for happiness; have not many of them been only Marahs that mocked that thirst?

But when the hour of disappointment comes,

then is the very hour for God to sweeten the bitterness by showing us a Tree of life which takes the poison away, and turns despondency into joy. The tree He showed to Moses was not one created then and there by miracle. It was already growing at the side of the pool ; and the Lord does not need to create some new consolations for our suffering hearts, a new Bible, or a new mercy-seat, or a new Christ, or a new atonement, or new promises, or new grace. They are all there, close beside us, waiting for our time of need. He has simply to open our eyes to see them, and give us power to use them, and they will turn any sorrow into thanksgiving and praise. Hagar did not see the well in the desert of Beersheba till "the Lord opened her eyes" that were blinded by tears, but the well had been there, and close beside her all the time. Our help is always far nearer than we think ; alas ! that we have not always either the opened eye or the trustful, taking hand !

But God does more than merely heal the bitter waters. He leads His pilgrims beyond them to other wells that are always sweet. When Marah is behind us Elim is in front. The nearness of Elim to Marah is suggestive : only six miles separated the one from the other. Do not the sweetnesss and the bitternesses of life lie very near each other after all ? Marahs are

not the only experiences of the pilgrimage, though many a weary sufferer would have us believe that they are. Life has many Elims too; and it is often only a short day's journey from the misery to the joy. *Jacob* found this true. He was one of the saddest-hearted of men, alone with his fears; but as he "went on his way, the angels of God met him."¹ *David* found it true: "O my God, my soul is cast down within me, my tears have been my meat day and night"—there he is at Marah, a weary desponding man—but very soon he comes to Elim: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the health of His countenance."² *Hezekiah* found it true: "Mine eyes fail with looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me." Life is all Marah to him there. But as he goes on a little way, he can say, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness, but Thou hast in love to my soul cast all my sins behind Thy back: O Lord, by these (sorrowful) things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit."³ He has reached Elim now. *Paul* too had his Marah, when his thrice-repeated prayer for a removal of the "thorn" brought no alleviation of his pain; but he soon came to an Elim where

¹ Gen. xxxij. 1.² Ps. xlii.³ Isa. xxxviii.

he could say, "Most gladly will I glory in my infirmities, for when I am weak then am I strong."¹ And is it not written for all the pilgrims of God, "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth them for thirst"—sitting at a Marah bitter as death—"I the Lord will open fountains in the valleys, and make the dry land springs of water"?² So they shall have their Elims too.

We thank Thee, Lord, for weary days
When desert springs were dry;
For then we proved what depth of need
Thy Love could satisfy.

We knew Thee as we could not know
Through heaven's golden years;
We there shall see Thy glorious face,
But Mary saw Thy tears.

The touch that heals the broken heart
Is never felt above;
The angels know Thy blessedness,
But way-worn saints Thy love.

P. B,

¹ 2 Cor. xii.

² Isa. xli. 18,

A SONG IN THE NIGHT

Though crooked seem the paths, yet are they straight
By which Thou draw'st Thy children up to Thee ;
And passing wonders by the way they see,
And learn at last to own Thee wise and great.

Let not my proud heart dictate, Lord, to Thee,
But tame the wayward will that seeks its own,
And wake the love that clings to Thee alone,
And takes Thy chastenings in humility.

Lyra Germanica.

XIV

A SONG IN THE NIGHT

HERE is another choice saying from the Book of Psalms,¹ "I will bless the Lord at all times ; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Who said that ? Surely he must have been one remarkably exempt from the troubles of life ? Not so. He was one whose life was fuller of strange vicissitudes, and more loaded with trials than that of almost any other at his side. Great mercies he had to speak of, great deliverances, great honours, great joys ; but he could also tell of great sorrows, great calamities, great reverses of fortune, great punishments for his sins. And yet, with all these full in view, he could say, "I will bless the Lord at all times," in my darkest as well as in my brightest hours, in my weary wanderings as well as in my peaceful home, in my sorest chastenings as well as in my purest joys ; and it was not simply "I will

¹ Ps. xxxiv. 1.

acknowledge the Lord at all times," nor "I will *submit* to the Lord at all times." It was far more: "I will *bless* the Lord at all times." In the very things that seemed fitted only to depress, he found materials for a song!

Reading these wonderful Psalms—or rather singing them, for they were meant to be songs for the lip as well as for the heart—we often feel borne up on eagles' wings into the calm serenity of heaven, and yet we shrink from appropriating them, afraid that we have no right to such exalted joys. But this God is our God as well as David's God; and, looking up as David looked, believing what David believed, trusting where David trusted, we can claim notwithstanding all our sinfulness what David claimed notwithstanding his.

Can I praise God for the afflictions of my life? That is a testing question, and goes very deep. It is not, Can I trust Him in my trials? nor, Can I justify Him for sending them? It is not even, Can I look beyond them to the blessed rest of heaven? It is something far more than these, Can I praise Him for them even here and now? Great grace is needed for that, and only Spirit-taught souls can do it.

Why are we not *always* able to do it, even though we are living by faith? Perhaps the

chief reason is that we are lacking in the child-like simplicity of faith which earlier believers had. We have better knowledge than they, we have larger promises than they, we have a clearer revelation of God's heart of love than they, and yet men of faith in the old days seem to have lived nearer to God than most of us can do. Perhaps it is because childhood is always more confiding than age, or because God was making up to them for the dimness of their light by drawing them closer to it that they might see more distinctly ; but men like Abraham and Moses and David and Isaiah do seem to have been on exceedingly intimate terms with God. Think of Abraham's prayer for Sodom : was there ever such boldness ? Think of Moses' communings with God : was communion ever more close ? Think of Jehoshaphat's faith : was faith ever more sublime ? Think of David's joyous trust : was joy ever loftier or more intense ? There are bursts of triumph in his Psalms which our most fervent Christian hymns cannot excel.

Hazlitt's half-satirical saying, "In Jacob's days there was only a ladder between earth and heaven ; but now the heavens have gone farther off, and become astronomical," expresses the feeling that the childlike character of faith has been greatly lost since the childhood of the

world passed away. We are distracted now by a thousand things unknown before : and clouds of immature science and shallow philosophy come between us and God. We must certainly get away from the " childish things " of the past, but we need far more of the " childlike " ; and Christ's great saying about the things that are revealed only to " babes " is a hint of how we can alone get back to the old sweetness of intercourse with a Father in heaven. It is this child-spirit which alone can show us reasons why we should " in everything give thanks."

It will be easy for us to bless God for afflictions when we feel that God is making affliction a blessing to us ; and this is what He often does. When it both reveals and purges out many hidden evils of the heart, humbles our pride and self-sufficiency, breaks the power of worldliness, and makes the centre of our affections not earthly but spiritual riches—when it leads to a more absolute faith, God seeming to say, " Now I am testing you to see whether you can trust me to the uttermost, have you faith enough to do it ? " —when it refines and beautifies the whole character, so that there is a mellowing and sweetening of the life in gentler patience, and kindlier sympathy, and more perfect love—and when there is gained thereby an altogether new sense of the sustaining power of Grace—these are

blessings of the very highest kind, and more than worth the pain through which they come : as one in very deep and prolonged affliction was able to write, " I am getting more in love with suffering every day, not for its own sake, for certainly there is nothing very lovable in it, but I never knew before how good God can be, how near to me He could come, and how sweet His comforts would prove."

One of the fine services which sanctified affliction renders is that it forces us out of the region of dim uncertainties and mere talk into the region of great realities. There are moments in life when the vision becomes more than ordinarily clear, and God seems the nearest as well as the dearest of all realities and it is often in deep sorrows that such ravishing moments come. If we want to find the men and women who live nearest to the gates of pearl, and have the most entrancing views of what God has prepared for those that love Him, we must seek them among the suffering, in homes of privation and sorrow, rather than in the palaces of kings.

Do we always realise that sickness is a gift from God, as much as health ? We commonly speak as if health alone were the gift, and sickness a withdrawal of the gift ; but sickness is really as much a gift as health, and a love-gift

too. God's purpose for one beloved child may be that he shall serve Him much by active labour, and so He gives to that one the precious gift of health ; but His purpose for another equally beloved child may be that he shall be a notable witness to the power of His purifying and refining grace, and so He sends to him the precious gift of a long and sore affliction ; and the Lord, the Giver of both, may be as much glorified by the sanctified patience of the one as by the sanctified labours of the other. A sick-bed is often doing as much for Christ as many a pulpit.

Instead of saying in any deep trouble, "How sorely I am tried !" it would be better to say, "How many blessings are left me still !" We are always reckoning up our sorrows, why should we not count up our mercies too ? When God comes into the home, and takes a loved child away, instead of complaining of the loss of the one, might we not rather thank Him that He has left the rest ? If He removes our earthly prosperity, but leaves untouched the dearer treasures of sweet faces round the hearth, would it not be more befitting to praise Him for the treasures spared than to complain of the riches lost ? O my soul, "forget not *all* His benefits," and thou, too, wilt learn to "bless the Lord at *all* times" ; thou wilt exchange

the "spirit of heaviness" for "garments of praise."

Ah ! vain conceit that glory with its light
 Could do the work of Sorrow with its shade ;
That Faith's high triumphs could be won by sight,
 Or man, without the cross, be God-like made.

J. B. MONSELL.

THE LONG LAST MILE

See also p. 50

The way is long, my Father, and my soul
Longs for the rest and quiet of the goal :
While yet I journey through this weary land
Keep me from fainting, Father, take my hand,
And, safe and blest, lead up to rest
Thy child.

Leading

The way *is* long, my child, but it shall be
Not one step longer than is best for thee ;
And thou shalt know when thou at last dost stand
Safe at the goal, how I *did* take thy hand,
And, safe and blest, with Me shall rest.
My child.

The Changed Cross.

XV

THE LONG LAST MILE

IN one of our hymns, singing the glory of the risen Christ, there is a minor key which exactly expresses the feelings of many a sufferer. After saying,

Thou art gone up on high
To mansions in the skies;
And round Thy Throne unceasingly
The songs of praise arise,

it goes on :

But we are lingering here,
With sin and care oppress'd :
Lord, send Thy promised Comforter,
And lead us to Thy rest.

That is just the feeling and the prayer of thousands of God's stricken ones. They are lying useless, they say, on beds of pain, while the busy world and a busy church are full of active life; cut off from all service, only "lingering here": sad-hearted lingerers too, "with sin

and care oppressed"; and their one intense desire is to be as quickly as possible at home.

This may be a quite legitimate feeling, but it may also be a morbid one; for there are two heart-attitudes towards heaven which are evil: on the one hand, an extreme reluctance to be done with earthly joys, and a great unreadiness of spirit for such a place as heaven; on the other, an extreme eagerness to escape the sadnesses of life, with an undertone of rebellion against the long and seemingly needless continuance of the discipline of pain.

Do we not know men who talk eloquently about the blessedness of heaven, and yet, if suddenly called to enter it, would be greatly disappointed that it had come so soon? A speedy entrance into what they believe to be the "better country" is not a very attractive prospect. They are really unwilling to die. And, strange to say, this unwillingness to part with the present world does not always grow less with advancing years. A clinging to life often grows stronger as life is nearing its close. Neither does the fact that life has been very full of sorrows always make us willing to give it up.

Proofs of this are seen in many ways. Some, from this feeling, do not like their real age to be known. Others, from the same feeling, affect a foolish youthfulness of manner and of dress.

Others again, for the same reason, dislike any allusion to their increasing infirmities, are morbidly afraid to make their wills, are rendered uncomfortable by seeing dangerous illness, still more by witnessing actual death, and never speak of death at all. They profess to believe that heaven will be infinitely better than earth can be, and yet they do not really believe it, else they would not be so alarmed at what brings it near.

The other extreme, however, does not mend matters much. To disparage the present life as being only a scene of vexation and sorrow, to look at nothing in it except its trials, to be eager for heaven simply because it will bring a release from burden-bearing and pain—that is not a Christian attitude, whatever else it may be. The desire to depart, if a spiritual one, cannot be too strong; but mere weariness of life has nothing spiritual in it at all. Christ, our great Pattern, never spoke of His trials and sufferings in the tone of simple weariness. If He was eager to die, it was not to obtain release thereby, but only to have the joy of seeing His great redeeming work a finished thing for the saving of men and the glory of the Father Who had sent Him to do it.

The thoughts and feelings of heavenly-minded men will always be rising heavenwards; but

mere weariness of life's trials leads easily to faithlessness in life's responsibilities, and to doubts of the love that can let the trials last so long. "Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise"; and the patience needed is patience to live. "If life be long," said Richard Baxter, "I will be glad, that I may long obey," though he added, "If life be short, can I be sad to soar to endless day?" That is the noblest Christian attitude. To take lengthened suffering as an extended opportunity of glorifying God by calm acceptance of His will is infinitely better than to long faint-heartedly for release.

There are always sufficient reasons, both on His side and on our own, for any postponement of the home-call. Some of His best-loved children have so hard a lot, and such a warfare too with their imperfectly-sanctified natures, that it seems as if the greatest blessing He could give them would be just immediate release from all the suffering and all the sin; and often the words are uttered in paroxysms of unbearable pain—have we not often heard them?—"Oh, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" But what if the last fine touches have yet to be put to God's great work of reproducing the Christ-likeness in the soul? What if He Himself will be further served by the testimony of dying

lips ? What if He knows that there is still one other heart to be touched, one other soul to be won for Him by the sufferer, ere the hands drop and the lips are sealed ? What if He is thinking, too, of the sorrowers who will be left behind, and of how the thought that Death has come to their dear one as an unspeakable relief from agonising pain will make them more reconciled to the parting when it comes ?

Those who have had much to do with hearing the religious experience of seekers after God have found that a very large number of those led to decision for Christ were so led through seeing the triumph of some dear friend in the last hours of sickness ; and this may have been one reason why that dear friend's release was so long delayed. The sisters of Bethany could not understand why their loving Master was so long in coming to their relief ; but He said it was " for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby " ; and the event proved that it was so, for " many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw the things that Jesus did, believed on Him." If He delays to answer the prayers and longings of weary sufferers now, He will never linger one moment too long. He knows the exact amount of pain the heart can bear, and He will never let the pain become so intense that faith will fail. He knows, too,

what good is to come out of the lengthening of the pain, and for the sake of that He lets the weary heart live on.

Instead therefore of calling the long time of weariness a "lingering here," we might better call it, as Job did, "a patient waiting all the days of our appointed time till our change come." If patience is to "have its perfect work that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing," we must let God take His own time as well as His own way for bringing the great release.

Teach me to live ! 'tis easier far to die,
Gently and silently to pass away ;
On earth's long night to close the heavy eye,
And waken in the realm of glorious day.

Teach me that harder lesson, how to live
And serve Thee in the darkest paths of life ;
Arm me to conflict, strength and patience give,
And make me more than conqueror in the strife.

Voices of Comfort.

ON THE RIVER'S BRINK

135
We pace the deck together,
Faith and I ;
In stress of midnight weather,
Faith and I ;
And catch at times a vision
Of the bright Eastern sky
Where waiteth God to tell us
That we shall never die.

A mystic shape did move
Behind, and drew me backward by the hair,
And a Voice said in mastery while I strove,
“ Guess now who holds thee ! ” — “ Death,” I said ; but
there
The silver answer rang, “ Not Death, but Love.”

XVI

ON THE RIVER'S BRINK

ONE of the sweet consolations of the weary pilgrim as he nears the end of the way is that then he often gets his clearest visions of the Celestial City beyond. Bunyan calls this stage "the land of Beulah, where the air is very sweet and pleasant and the sun shineth night and day, for this is beyond the valley of the shadow of death, and also out of the reach of Giant Despair; neither could they so much as see Doubting Castle from this place. Here, too, they met with some of the inhabitants of the land they were going to, for here the shining ones often walked, because it is on the very borders of heaven."

It is sometimes so. Many of God's pilgrims have these hours of vision in the closing stage of the journey, just as Moses got a sublime vision of Canaan from Pisgah's top. There are Pisgahs everywhere to the heart of faith. A mountain-solitude, the chamber of prayer, the

sacramental feast, have often seemed to open all heaven to the wondering eye. But the chief mount of vision is just on this side of the river of death. The seers who see most of the glory are those who are appointed to die. There is a light sometimes upon a dying face that reflects a hidden sun, and murmurs are heard on dying lips that seem snatches of the songs of heaven. From meanest beds, in poorest garrets, God's dying saints have sometimes had visions of the coming glory far transcending anything of which poet ever dreamed.

But it is not always so ; indeed it is rarely so. Such glowing transports in the dying hour are quite exceptional. They cannot be calculated upon ; and the want of them need throw no doubt upon the reality of Christian faith. Very few Christians die in ecstasy. Every true Christian is a conqueror over death and absolutely safe ; but not every one has a song of victory on the dying lips. Martyrs have kissed the flames that were consuming them, and sung themselves into a waiting heaven ; and some believing souls have had death-beds lighted up with entrancing joys. But only a few Elijahs here and there go home in a chariot of fire. The largest part of God's redeemed host are carried out of sight in a chariot of cloud, conscious only of a deep inward calm and a blessed

hope. There is no rapture, only a sweet expectancy. In weakness of body and weariness of mind hardly a word is uttered, and all around the bed are falling tears.

Some, indeed, have even less than this. They die amid the shadows, trembling lest they should be castaways. Still, God's redeemed and loved are just as safe in the chariot of cloud as in the chariot of fire. The victory is real, though the song of victory is reserved for the other side, to burst forth in the first moment of entry within the veil. "I have no raptures," said a dying saint, "but I have perfect peace." That is enough. The song will come when the harp of heaven is in the hand, and the perfect voice can sing it as no voice can sing it here.

What gives this perfect peace? The cross and victory of a Redeeming Lord who gives to all believing souls the comfort of His own assurance, "Because I live, ye shall live also." It was the custom, of old, for the king's cup-bearer to taste the wine before putting the cup to the royal lips. If there was poison in it, the death of the cup-bearer would reveal that fact: the continued life of the wine-taster would be an assurance that the king might safely drink. So Christ "by the grace of God, tasted death." He drank of the cup, and showed that there was no poison in it for Him, for "behold, He is alive

for evermore"; and therefore, Christian, there is no poison in it for you. He makes you a sharer in His own perfect life. Through the very lowest of *your* experiences Jesus went, that into the very highest of *His* experiences you might go.

There are many glorious truths that no Christian would part with for all the world; and, next to the grand truth that the atoning death of Jesus is enough to cover all our sins, is the other truth that His heavenly Life is enough to cover all our fears; for He who by dying pledged Himself to "bring the many sons to glory" has been exalted to the Throne to make that promise good. Has He not Himself gathered up all the comfort of these two facts into one golden sentence, "My sheep shall never perish, I give unto them Eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of my hands"?¹ and was not Paul right, therefore, when he said, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"?² That magnificent chapter, the eighth of the Romans, begins with "no condemnation," and ends with "no separation." Does not this give "perfect peace"? On the Rock of Ages we have perfect peace; in the fiery furnace we may

¹ John x. 28.

² Rom. viii. 38.

have perfect peace ; in the shipwreck of earthly hope we can have perfect peace ; in the swellings of Jordan too we ought to have the same perfect peace, peace as perfect as in the heavenly home itself.

Richard Baxter spoke of the coming of his death-day as the coming of his " third birthday," and looked forward to it with the same joy as a child looks forward to a birthday feast : and good Rowland Hill used often to be heard singing softly to himself,

And when I'm to die,
To Jesus I'll fly,
Because he has loved me—I cannot tell why—
But this I do find,
We two are so joined,
He'll not be in glory and leave me behind.

That must be so, if the words of our Redeeming Lord are true, " Where I am there also shall my servant be."

If the thought of death is unwelcome, it is only because we are not on friendly terms with death ; and that again is due only to our not being on friendly terms with God. But with the sweet sense of His redeeming love and all that that love implies, we can look upon death as a kindly friend. " I would not paint death as a skeleton with a mower's scythe," said a child on looking at a picture representing it so, " I

would rather paint him as an angel with a golden key." It is only unforgiven guilt lying heavy on the conscience that can embitter death. The peace of God and the good hope through grace can make it even sweeter than being born. The felon trembles before the Judge, but the Judge's little child will not. He will run into his father's arms, and lift his face to be kissed, and smile into his father's eyes. Death will never be a terror to one who "knows the Father," and whose steadfast heart is clinging to the atoning cross of His Beloved Son. It will be only the last of the ministering angels sent forth to gather in the heirs of salvation. Well will it be for all of us if our only shrinking from death arises from the sorrow it will bring to others dear to us, and if for ourselves we know that to cross the river will be to enter into the celestial city on the other side.

O Joy ! one step ashore, and that shore heaven !
To clasp a Hand outstretched, and that Hand His
Who waits my coming, all earth's fetters riven,
To share the glory of His saints in bliss !

To pass, by one short breath, from storm and stress,
To breathe new air in one unbroken calm !
To sleep, and wake in undreamt blessedness,
With conqueror's crown, white robe, and victor's palm !

BESIDE THE GRAVE

Dear Saviour of a dying world
Where grief and change must be,
In the new grave where Thou wast laid
My heart lies down with Thee.

Oh ! not in cold despair of joy
Or weariness of pain ;
But in a hope that shall not die,
To rise and live again.

For this corruptible must rise
From all corruption free ;
And this frail mortal must put on
Thine Immortality.

A. L. WARING.

Corruption

XVII

BESIDE THE GRAVE

THERE are few more bitter moments in life than those in which our tears fall as we look for the last time on the white face of our beloved dead ; and God does not grudge us these tears. They are nature's relief, but they may be heaven's preparations too, sanctifying as well as soothing to the heart ; "sacred are sorrow's tears, for Jesus wept."

In the touching story of the weeping sisters at Bethany we see death striking a home that seemed the unlikeliest on earth to be invaded by such a foe just then ; for it had so long been the chosen retreat of Jesus, and its three inmates had been so long His dearest friends, that the keeping of *it* at least free from the desolation of death might have seemed essential to the comfort of the Lord Himself, to say nothing of the comfort of these close friends of His. Yet sorrow of the deepest kind came suddenly down,

and over their loved brother's dead body the sisters were shedding bitter tears. Did Christ rebuke them? Nay, He added His own holy tears to theirs. The tenderest touch in the picture is that which shows how "Jesus wept." It was probably the first time they had seen their Lord in tears; at least it was the first time that He and they had wept together, and over the same thing, and He seemed in that dark hour to be more one with them than ever.

How intensely human these tears of His! He knew that Lazarus was not lost to them, and yet He wept. He knew that, in a few moments more, intensest joy would fill these mourning hearts, and yet He wept. He knew that almost immediately they would have garments of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness, and yet He wept. It was intensely human, intensely sympathetic, intensely beautiful, and intensely comforting as well; and it is a very suggestive fact that the Gospel by John—the gospel which more fully than any other shows us the real Godhead of Jesus,—is the Gospel in which His perfect humanity also comes most clearly into view. It shows us that He who was Divine enough to raise the dead was human enough to weep with those that were mourning the dead; Divine enough to dry the mourner's tears, yet human enough to shed tears Himself.

We are all made sadly familiar with the ravages of death as we witness the frequent funeral processions that pass along our streets, or see one family after another putting on the mourner's dress ; but how much more keenly we realise the horror of death when it comes into our own happy home or into the circle of our dear companionships. So was it with the Lord Himself, who was "in all things made like unto His brethren," for that home in Bethany was probably the first place where the grim horror of death had come closely home to His own human affections. Why did He weep ? Was it not just because He knew so well what sorrow needs ? It needs sympathy above all else, and though He had larger blessings in store for these weeping ones, He gave them that one first of all. How near this brings Him to us all ! how specially near to sad-hearted weepers in the death-chamber or at the grave ! Then is His chosen time for showing the sympathy of His tender loving heart. We never know how tender His consoling voice can be till some crushing sorrow comes, just as a mother may let her child run about from room to room, or go outside for play, and take small notice of it so long as it is perfectly happy and well ; but, when accident or sickness comes, runs quickly to take it into her arms and lay it upon her

breast, and lavish over it all her most endearing words. Is it not God Himself Who says, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" ? ¹

But comfort is not the only thing we need, if the graves of our beloved are to be made places of true blessing to our souls. Standing there, many solemn thoughts may well stir within us, many serious self-questionings, many deep heart-searchings may come. The life of the dead is sure to be reviewed, many half-forgotten incidents in it are sure to be recalled, and our own life in relation to the dead will be reviewed as well. Happy they who, at such a time, will not have to weep over remembered harshnesses and bitternesses, over biting words that made a loving heart ache for days, over selfishnesses and sins that hastened the death so mourned at last, and made it a heavier sorrow than it would otherwise have been, because reparation is now an impossible thing !

Even where there is nothing of this, and the remembrances are only sweet, to stand at the grave is still a solemn thing. It brings us closer to eternal realities than almost anything else can do. No doubt the impressiveness of it may soon pass away. It often does. The gracious and sanctified feelings awakened by the dead

¹ Isa. lxvi. 13.

face may be short-lived. They often are. But the heart must be hard indeed that has not had some deep yearnings after holiness and heaven in an hour like that ; and God means the bitter sorrow not only to lift our eyes heavenward but to turn them inward too, that we may ask ourselves what death will mean to us—an eternal gain, or only an eternal loss ? a loving home-call, or only a banishment from the home of love and peace for ever ?

There is something very humbling in the necessity for the burial of our dead. It is painful beyond words when the body that had long enshrined a bright and beautiful spirit becomes so corrupt that we can no longer bear to look upon it, and we say, like Abraham, “ Give me a sepulchre that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” And yet the resting-place of the lifeless clay is holy ground, and a visit to it may be a very sanctifying thing. Say what we will of the sadness of the grave, there is a mournful satisfaction in looking at the place where loved ones lie. The mother of the sailor-boy who was buried at sea will often feel that it would have been an unspeakable comfort to her had she been able to bury him in the village churchyard, where she might go now and then to weep as she scattered flowers upon his grave, and fancy him not very far away. It is a natural

feeling, and God can make it a means of grace.

But, whether the grave is thus visited or not, the separation made by death is always a solemn thing. How it would sweeten the parting if each were assured of the other's faith! How different many a leave-taking would be, if both knew that it was only for a little while, and that the reunion would be everlasting! How blessed for mourners left in tears to know assuredly that those who are gone have only departed "to be with Christ"! and this bright assurance may be the comfort of all whose friends gave evidence, ere they fell asleep, that they had really been "living by faith in the Son of God Who loved them and gave Himself for them."

We often speak of our sorrows as being God's strange answers to many of our prayers, prayers for greater holiness of heart and life, for more perfect detachment of spirit from the world, and for a deepening of faith. But do we ever think that in the death of our beloved who have gone home to heaven there has been only an answer to the greater prayer of Christ Himself? Why was it that that dear one was taken from your side, and from the love-grasp that would have held it longer if it could? Was it not because while *you* were praying, almost in agony, "Father, let this dear one whom Thou hast given me be

still with me *where I am*," Christ was praying, "Father, I will that this one whom Thou hast given me be with me *where I am*" ;¹ and His prayer prevailed over yours, as it was right it should, for yours was ignorant but His was wise ; yours was love, but His was love deeper still ? Can you grudge your Lord that answer to a prayer of His ?

Our eyes behold Thee not,
Yet hast Thou not forgot
Those who have placed their hope, their trust, in Thee ;
Before Thy Father's face
Thou hast prepared a place,
That where Thou art there they may also be.

SARAH E. MILES.

¹ John xvii. 24.

THE SORROW OF THE HOPELESS

Leave all to God : thy vision cannot scan
His ways of Righteousness, His depths of grace;
But thou shalt know, when thou dost see His face,
How full of holy love His perfect plan.

Leave all to God : but hear Him speak to thee,
"Cling *thou* the more to Me when clouds are dark,
Make sure that thou thyself art in the Ark ;
All else thou then wilt calmly leave to Me."

XVIII

THE SORROW OF THE HOPELESS

THERE are no mourners more intensely to be pitied than those who have seen loved friends die without leaving behind them any good hope that they have gone into the Everlasting Peace ; and that sorrow is intensified a hundred-fold if these friends had been living a regardless life of sin. Grief like this is dark indeed, and must always be touched with a very gentle, delicate, and sympathetic hand. Yet, at such a time, the mourners are sorely tempted to put aside all the solemn teachings of the New Testament regarding the fate of the Christless soul, and to cheat themselves into the idea that they do not really mean what they seem plainly to say.

No clearer words regarding the sad fate of the impenitent were ever uttered than by Him who was Incarnate Love, and whose whole mission of love was expressly to prevent any one from

incurring that fate ; and, in our eager desire to comfort the mourning, we dare not deny or even minimise the solemnity of these words of His. This, however, is often done by the mourners themselves. They try to comfort themselves by such sayings as these, " He gave no evidence of real faith in Christ, of renewal of heart and life, of preparation for eternity, of love to God and obedience to His will, and yet he had so many attractive qualities, such kindliness, generosity, uprightness, unselfishness, that surely he cannot be shut out from heaven " ; or, " God is too merciful to doom His creatures in such a way, and His threatenings must mean something far less appalling than they seem to do " ; or, " The great sufferings of life here were sufficient punishment, and sufficient atonement too " ; or, " There will be a new probation beyond the grave " ; or, " The fire of which Christ spoke will be only a purifying, cleansing fire, doing hereafter what was not done here, and so fitting the soul for eternal blessedness at last." Theories, conjectures, hopes like these are a common resource of grief-torn hearts ; and most gladly would one echo them if it were possible. But they will not do. The very conscience protests against some of them, and the others are contradicted by the only Book that can speak authoritatively on the matter ; for, in all its

teachings regarding life's opportunities, the note of *finality* is the predominant one. Renewal and salvation are to be experienced here, and not hereafter: what we are on this side death, that only will we be beyond it. One naturally shrinks from obtruding this truth upon a heart that is deeply crushed; but we dare not minimise it. It is too plainly written to be denied; and in comforting our brethren we dare not be unfaithful to God.

Is there then no relief? The only possible relief is—and to the heart of faith it is sufficient—to fall back upon the great words, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"¹ God is Love, but He is also the Absolutely Righteous One, and we may be certain that upon any of His doings, however terrible they may be, not the least shadow of injustice will be allowed to rest. By Him as Judge, not only some but *all* the circumstances of each case will be tenderly taken into account. All possible mitigations of blame will be mercifully considered. The force of evil upbringing and evil environment, the power of inherited predisposition to sin, the subtlety of temptation, the ineffectual resistances of the heart to sin that enslaved it notwithstanding, all these will be impartially allowed for. Even the faintest signs of real repentance at the very

¹ Gen. xviii. 25.

last, signs distinguishable only by Him, will receive their full value at His hands, and His verdict will be "according to truth," so absolutely and so transparently just when revealed to all, that it will command the assent of every conscience that hears it. The reply of every heart will then be like the "great voice of much people in heaven saying Alleluia! glory and honour and power to the Lord our God, for true and righteous are His judgments." ¹

There is a striking passage in Leviticus which shows how even so overwhelming a sorrow as this can be accepted by a heart of faith. When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, sinned defiantly, and seemingly in a state of intoxication, by offering strange fire before the Lord, "there went out a fire from the Lord and devoured them, and they died." ² How did Aaron take that sudden judgment-stroke that cut down his two sons in the very act of sin? He rebelled for a moment, but when Moses showed him the Righteousness of God in the judgment, and told him that the purpose of it was that others must be deterred from like sin, and so the name of God be glorified, "Aaron held his peace." That attitude of acquiescence in God's righteousness is the only befitting attitude for those who have to mourn as Aaron did. Per-

¹ Rev. xix. 1.

² Lev. x.

haps the effect of such a stroke may often be still what it was then, a glorifying of God on the part of the living. If such a death should awaken others to a truer sense of their sin, and stir within them a new desire to live to God ; if it should bring home to others the imperative necessity for a true faith in Christ, if they are not to miss heaven too, even so terrible a death will glorify God, and the ways of God will be justified in the feelings of all to whom their own salvation and the honour of God in the world are dear.

But the great consolation lies in looking straight up to God Himself, saying, " I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right," and asking only for that meek submission to His holy Righteousness in which is peace. Perhaps it was when thinking of the tragic death of his son Absalom that David said, " I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it." ¹ That is not an easy thing to say. It needs a strong faith to say it : and yet what else *can* the heart of faith say than that ?

Get nearer to God yourself, crushed heart ; think of this sore grief as meant to draw yourself at least nearer to Him. Leave it to Him to explain his own Righteousness at last, as He assuredly will. Believe that when you see every-

¹ Ps. xxxix. 9.

thing just as He does, you will say Amen to all His doings ; and then you may get some comfort by realising more the blessedness of being yourself an heir of heaven, if you really are such, able to say, " Though my house be not so with God yet hath He made with *me* an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." ¹

" Clouds and darkness are round about Him, but Righteousness and Justice are the foundation of His Throne." Get nearer to God yourself, and the waves of sorrow will break quietly at the foot of that high Throne, and there will be " a great calm."

O anguished heart, nigh breaking for the dead
 Who died and made no sign,
 Leave them with God : perhaps, ere life had fled,
 They saw, at last, the Saving Christ Who bled,
 Found their atonement in the Blood He shed,
 And trusted Love Divine.

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

WITHIN THE VEIL

How can it be that one so mean,
So sinful, selfish, dark, unclean,
 Within the Holiest stands ?
And in that Light divinely pure
That may no stain of sin endure
 Lifts up rejoicing hands ?

Jesus ! the answer Thou hast given,
Thy life, Thy death, have opened heaven
 And all its joys to me ;
Washed in Thy blood—oh ! wondrous grace—
I'm holy as the Holy Place
 In which I worship Thee.

The Changed Cross.

XIX

WITHIN THE VEIL

IT is a relief to turn from the gloom of the last chapter and think of the assured and perfect blessedness of those who die "in the Lord"; even though as to this there is less revealed than we long to know. Christ Himself did not speak much to His disciples about heaven. Archbishop Fenelon finely says: "This King was too accustomed to the glories of His palace to be always talking about them." But what He did say of it He said with the accent of absolute certainty, the certainty of one whose home it was, and who knew it well: and yet it surprises us to find how little He said of it after all. One single thought, repeated in various forms, is all we hear, the thought that its blessedness will consist in our being *with Himself*—"with Me in Paradise," "with Me where I am," "I will receive you to Myself," that is nearly all He says; and yet to the heart that loves Him that is enough.

It includes all else. The realm beyond is shrouded in impenetrable mist, but this one bright light shines out upon it, and the heart of faith says, "I need no more ; to be not only in the joy of Christ, but in the very presence of Christ, in closest and most intimate fellowship with my Redeeming Lord, all doubt for ever gone, all separating sin a thing for ever past, my soul and His beating in absolute unison with one another—that is all the heaven I need, and all that I desire." And that is the heaven into which every ransomed spirit enters the moment that it quits the mortal clay. No sooner is it "absent from the body" than it is "present with the Lord." The transition is immediate, and it is conscious too. There is not for the dying believer (as many imagine and many say) a long interval of unconsciousness between death and the resurrection. Paul speaks of "them that sleep," but it is the body, not the soul, that sleeps. In the sleep of the body even here, dreams show that the soul is thoroughly awake, though concerned with a different region than its surrounding one ; and the expression "sleeping" as applied to the dead is merely a figurative one, implying peace and rest, but not implying anything like unconsciousness. Indeed the idea that the soul continues in a state of virtual annihilation all the time that Christ is waiting for His Kingdom is not only unscriptural but un-

thinkable. If it is "with Christ" in any real sense, it must be conscious that it is, must know and feel what that fellowship means.

The voice from heaven which John in Patmos heard saying, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth : for they rest from their labours and their works do follow them,"¹ cannot be reconciled with any theory of their unconsciousness of their blessedness and rest, nor can such unconsciousness be reconciled with their joy in seeing then the fruit of their works which they never saw below. That voice from heaven is one of the great Benedictions, and may almost be said to give, in a single sentence, the whole New Testament teaching on the unseen life of Christ's redeemed. They are "blessed" consciously, and blessed everlastingly, and their blessedness is like the blessedness of Christ Himself. They are resting from labour as Christ is resting. Their works follow them as Christ's works are following Him. And they too, like Christ, are living in the expectation of a higher blessedness yet to come. He is waiting for His appearing in glory as universal King ; and they are waiting for the resurrection-body, a body glorious as His heavenly Body is, a body of larger powers, fitting them for nobler service than was possible to the former body of corruption. They

¹ Rev. xiv. 13.

are as yet pure spirits only, "unclothed" with the spiritual body in which they will for ever shine and serve ; but they have that glorious addition to their blessedness ever before them, and they are longing to reach it.

They have perfect peace, and they are waiting for their perfect service too. They are for ever done with toil and unrest, and weariness and pain, and hindrances to fellowship with one another as well as with Christ. There are no more misunderstandings, no separations of feeling, no self-reproaches for sin, no need for repentance, no stirrings of remorse, such as even the best of them often had below. They are "without fault before the Throne of God,"¹ without fault because Christ whose likeness they wear is without fault ; and all the sin of the earlier life is so completely blotted out from the very memory that it is as though it had never been.

It is a marvellous thought that the holiness of these "saints in light" will be of a kind far surpassing the holiness of angels that never fell ; and that the only thing in them that would suggest to any inhabitant of heaven that they had once been sinners will be the singular radiance of the Christ-likeness in them, the altogether peculiar brightness of His image in them marking them out from all others as those for whom the Prince of

¹ Rev. xiv. 5.

Glory died. It will not be any imperfection in their holiness as compared with that of angels, but just the surpassing perfection of it, that will show them to have been the special subjects of absolutely transforming grace.

And therefore they are nearer to Christ Himself than angels are. "To him that overcometh," said Christ, "I will grant to sit with Me upon My Throne";¹ and that Throne is a Throne of judgment as well as of dignity and glory. Paul says "the saints shall judge the world," "know ye not that we shall judge angels?" How marvellously complete must be their likeness in thought and feeling and conscience and equity of discrimination to Christ Himself, if they can be assessors with Him on the Judgment Throne, and be trusted to do the work of judgment as faithfully as he!

A statement like this seems almost unbelievable; and we can easily sympathise with the feelings of the Chinese convert who was assisting in the translation of the Scriptures into his native tongue, and who, when he came to Rev. iii. 21, laid down his pen, and with the tears of a beautiful humility running down his face, said, "Oh! it is too much, too much, let me rather write, 'they shall be permitted to kiss My feet.'" But there the words stand, "To sit with Me upon My

¹ Rev. iii. 21.

Throne ” ; and they are Christ’s own words to every overcomer here.

Do they seem too great for even Him to use ? We have only to grasp the full meaning of that word “ *Redemption* ” to see that the perfection of a redeemed soul cannot be exaggerated, for it is a bringing of it back not merely to the happiness and holiness of unfallen men, or of unfallen angels, but to the absolutely perfect and unlosable holiness and happiness of Christ Himself.

Let the mourner think of it—think of those who have died in the Lord as being now not only saints in the fullest sense of the word, but *saints in light*, so pure that even in the blaze of the glory of God they are unabashed, “ presented faultless in the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy ” —their own joy, and also the exceeding joy of the Christ who died to win them, and finds in having them beside Him, holy as Himself, the reward of that Love that took Him to the Cross.

Think of it—and could you wish them back to earth again ?

Only “ Good-night ! ” beloved, not “ Farewell ! ”
 A little while and all His saints shall dwell
 In hallowed union, indivisible ;
 “ Good-night † ”

SARAH DOUDNEY.

THE ETERNAL HOME

Dark streams are still dividing
Between my Lord and me ;
Time's midnight hills are hiding
The land I fain would see.

But oh ! the wondrous morrow !
Life without pain or loss—
The Saints without their Sorrow,
And Christ without the Cross !

O Lord, recall Thy banished,
And home Thy weary bring,
To view, where night has vanished,
Their Country and their King !

A. R. COUSIN.

*The King in his
beauty*

XX

THE ETERNAL HOME

AN abiding and sinless Home for God's redeemed is the final consolation for all the sorrows of time. But where will it be? and what will life in it be like? These questions cannot be fully answered yet, for we know not by eye, or ear, or heart what God has prepared for them that love Him; still, enough is revealed to make our conceptions of the final blessedness more definite than we sometimes fancy they can be.

Where the spirits of the blessed dead at present are we know not, except that they are "with Christ"; but we have more than hints of where they shall be when clothed with the spiritual bodies that will be given them at His glorious appearing. Then only will they be completely fitted for their eternal Home, and then only will the Home be ready for them; and Scripture seems plainly to suggest that that final Home

will be just this earth of ours after it has been purified from all the marks and effects of sin by the last judgment-fires, and made "a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." The parallel drawn by the apostle Peter¹ between the purging of the old world by the flood and the purging of the present world by fire, seems clearly to point to this. The future Home, however spiritual, will certainly also be a material one, a new earth but still an earth, an earth suited to its new inhabitants but still an earth, an earth as pure as when it first came forth from its Creator's hands, and not merely pure for the moment with the possibility of sin entering it again, but eternally and indefeasibly pure—as completely beyond all risk of defilement as the dwellers in it will be beyond all risk of a second fall. What more divinely fitting consummation of God's redeeming work could there be than this—first a redeeming of the spirit, then a redeeming of the body, and then a redeeming of the very earth itself? It is a prospect that entirely satisfies the heart that this very world, so long the scene of Satan's malignant rule, should be the scene of Christ's eternal victory, that just where all unrighteousness has reigned, universal righteousness should shine, that the same earth where God's saints have suffered and wept should be the earth

¹ 2 Peter iii.

where all memorials of sorrow have disappeared and where tears are for ever wiped away.

Imagine what this earth, even as we know it to-day, would be if, for one week only, every heart in it was holy, if every feeling was obedience to God and love to man, if there were no fightings for pre-eminence, no cruelties, no jealousies, no heartburnings, no wrongs of any kind. Imagine next, that week expanded into a year, the year into a century, the century into eternity ; could there be a more entrancing picture of blessedness than that ? Then add the fact that all the dwellers there will be endowed with the marvellous new glories and powers of the "spiritual body" fashioned like to the glorified body of the Son of Man, and we have the final touch that makes the blessedness complete.

When Paul says, "Who shall change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like to the body of His glory,"¹ he supposes us to know what the body of His glory was ; and we immediately think of that body in which he moved on this very earth for forty days after His resurrection from the grave, and see in it a specimen of what the risen bodies of His saints shall be. It was a body of marvellously intensified power, a body that knew no hindrances or disabilities either from outward space or from inward weariness.

¹ Phil. iii. 21, R.V.

ness, a body that stone walls could not exclude nor earth's gravitation detain, a body that could assume different forms and be visible or invisible at will, a body so like the old that He remained "that same Jesus," and yet so changed that many who once had known Him well failed to recognise Him when they met, and one doubting heart, at least, required a sight of the prints of the crucifixion-nails to convince him that it was really He.

It was a body of marvellously enhanced beauty too, all traces of the sorrows and sufferings that had made Him look prematurely old having utterly disappeared, a body so shining with an indefinable glory that those who used before to talk familiarly to Him kept at a reverential distance from Him, worshipping Him as the Lord, instead of speaking to Him in their old homely way as to an earthly friend. He seemed to be living, for these forty days, in a region of mystery. His appearances were called "showings of Himself," implying that ordinarily He was invisible, and needed to put on a visible form to be seen at all. His comings and goings were like those of a spirit, and yet He was not a spirit, for He said, "Handle Me and see; a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see Me to have."

We cannot therefore go wrong if, in reply to the question, "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" we point to the

glorified Christ of these forty days and say, "When He shall appear we shall be *like Him*," set free from all present limitations and disabilities, having bodily powers as yet unknown, fitting us for great services from which we are now debarred, able to move unhindered over all God's fair creation, and explore the wonders of it now concealed, to become acquainted, perhaps, with other worlds as well, and to serve, it may be, as God's messengers of grace to them.

But however this may be, the new earth will at least be a sphere of utter happiness as well as of utter holiness, a place where the sacred and hallowed companionships of this world will be resumed, and wider companionships be given—where the saints of all ages, "a multitude that no man can number," will become known to each other, and talk to each other of the grace that brought them there—where every intellectual faculty and every social feeling, and every pure affection will have room for expansion to the uttermost—where the knowledge of God will continually increase, and love to God become deeper every moment, and where the glad service of God and of one another will go on in hitherto unimagined ways—and all this with the help of angels who for millions of ages have bathed in that love of God and served Him without sin. It is a prospect, surely, of surpassing joy, and what

infinite consolation there is in the hope of it for those especially who have long been sorrowing from bereavement and loneliness and weakness here. It is the last and greatest of all the consolations of God, and it is bound up with the "glorious appearing" of Jesus Christ. It is the crowning joy that awaits us "at His coming," and the hope of that coming must assuredly, therefore, be "a blessed hope." It is striking to note how constantly *this*, and nothing short of this, is presented as the great consolation of suffering and weary souls. "Let not your heart be troubled," said Jesus. Why? Because you will soon follow me through death, and death will bring us together again? Not so. "I will *come again* and receive you unto myself." ¹ "Ye men of Galilee," said the angels, "why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus shall"—what? Soon take you away from sorrow by death? Not so. "Shall *so come* in like manner as ye have seen Him go." ² "The Lord *shall descend* from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God"—so says Paul to the sorrowful of his day. "The dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; wherefore comfort one another with *these words*." ³ So it always is. Not our

¹ John xiv. 3.² Acts i. 11.³ 1 Thess. iv. 16-8.

going to the Lord in death, but the Lord's coming for us in glory is the grand consolation and hope. The early Christians were described as those who "love His appearing," who "wait for God's Son from heaven." Could most Christians now be so described? Has not this joyous hope, this eager longing for the Lord's personal return, almost died out of the Church? We lose immensely by this. Both for the quickening of zeal and for victory over sorrow and despair, we need to have this blessed hope a far more constant inmate of the breast. Sorrow and sighing would far more quickly fly away, if we but listened more joyfully to the sweet words, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." If He who so intensely loves us says, "Surely I come quickly," well may every heart that loves Him say, "Amen, even so, Come, Lord Jesus."

The whole creation groans
And waits to hear that Voice
That shall restore her comeliness,
And make her wastes rejoice.
Come, Lord, and wipe away
The curse, the sin, the stain;
And make this blighted world of ours
Thine own fair world again.
Come then, Lord Jesus, Come!

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